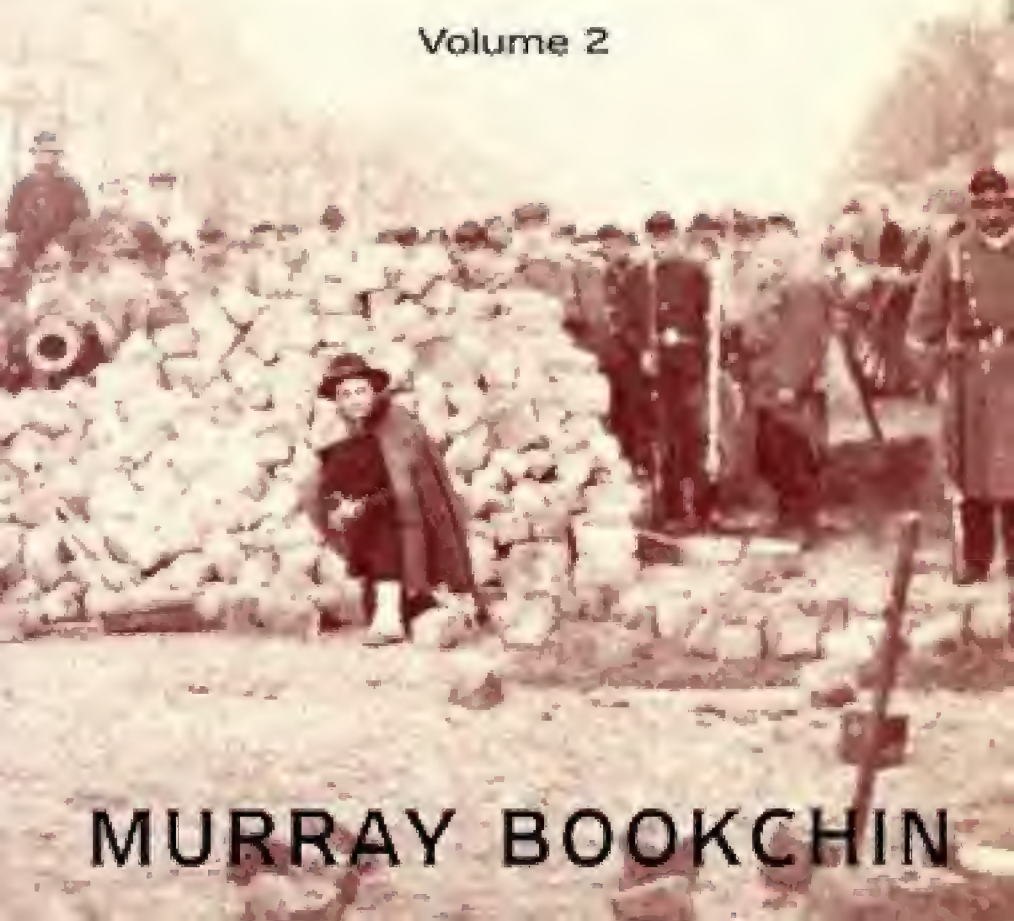


# THE THIRD REVOLUTION

Popular Movements in the  
Revolutionary Era

Volume 2



MURRAY BOOKCHIN

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*From Urbanization to Cities (1995)*

*Re-enchanting Humanity (1995)*

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*The Murray Bookchin Reader (edited by Janet Biehl) (1997)*

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REVOLUTIONARY ERA

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VOLUME TWO

Murray Bookchin



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*For my granddaughter Katya*

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## Preface

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This volume, the second of *The Third Revolution*, deals primarily with the major nineteenth-century uprisings of the French working class, from the Revolution of 1830 through the Revolution of 1848 to the Paris Commune of 1871. It also necessarily examines the origins and history of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) or First International and the Second International, primarily a Marxist social democratic association heavily influenced by the German Social Democratic Party. The increasingly ideological nature of nineteenth-century workers' movements and the emergence of a modern proletariat and an industrial capitalist class made it necessary for me to explore in some detail the transition from Jacobinism, a radical republican ideology and movement, to various socialisms oriented toward the working class. During the first half of the century a modern class conflict really appeared in both England and France and, with it, various socialist and anarchist ideologies that were already sprouting in the immediate aftermath of the Great French Revolution. Hence, in addition to covering the revolutions themselves, I provide summary accounts of the ideological transition from left-wing Jacobinism to outright socialism.

In a sense, this volume is not only an account of one of the stormiest periods of popular insurrections in modern history but also an account of nineteenth-century France, as seen through the lens of its great revolutionary movements and ideologies. The revolutions of 1830, 1848, and 1871 in Paris were, in great part, extensions of the Revolution of 1789 to 1794, which is also how many of their participants regarded them. In contrast to most conventional historians, I share Roger V. Gould's view that the June 1848 insurrection of the Parisian workers was the most class-conscious of all nineteenth-century French revolutions, even more than the dramatic Paris Commune of 1871, which was by no means socialist or exclusively working class in character—it was actually less a class revolution than a municipal, political, and patriotic phenomenon, precipitated by the Prussian siege of Paris. But the June

insurrection of 1848 can be seen, as many of its participants saw it, as the "third revolution" that the *sans-culottes* had hoped to make in 1793.

This volume is also an account of the transition from artisanal socialism to proletarian socialism. The two forms of socialism, while overlapping in many respects, were also different in their goals and methods. Indeed, the book's narrative pivots on this transition, as well as on the shift from the small handicraft workshop to the modern capital-intensive factory, with the differences in sensibility and politics that the transformation produced. In 1789 and 1830, the militants were primarily artisans, especially journeymen, and by trade were often carpenters, masons, furniture makers (particularly in the Saint-Antoine district of Paris), and printers, rather than factory workers. By the turn of the twentieth century, the leading militant members of the working classes were metalworkers, who retained the independent spirit of skilled artisans while simultaneously forming an integral part of the factory environment. Among the thousands of semiskilled or unskilled and poorly educated proletarians in factories, it was these "artisan-proletarians," so to speak, who were the most educated, forceful, and independent and to whom the others turned for leadership. They begin to appear as early as June 1848, and as the reader of volume 3 will find, they played a very prominent role in the great revolutionary wave that swept over Russia and Germany between 1917 and 1921.

I share the view of Bernard H. Moss, William H. Sewell, Jr., and other recent historians of the nineteenth-century French working class that ideas of cooperative, indeed collective production and distribution (as distinguished from individualistic forms) became very widespread in Paris in the years after 1830, and especially following the 1848 Revolution. These ideas varied greatly and were often vague in conception, ranging from simple trade unions with guildlike features to cooperatives with egalitarian and collectivist methods of production and distribution. It is highly unlikely that Parisian artisans or even "skilled workers," as Moss calls them, moved unerringly in the direction of developing collective forms of work. After all, about fifty percent of the enterprises in Paris during the 1840s were owned by artisanal masters, often aided by one or more assistants.

But many of these master craftsmen aspired to secure their independent status against the efforts of merchant capitalists to control them, and against the encroachments of the factory system which, judging from the unsavory English example, threatened one day to proletarianize them as well. The need to defend their trades, or *états*, from merchant control and industrial competition alike made them eager to unite with their fellow masters in cooperative societies. But it is unlikely that most of these artisan masters aspired to create a full-blown socialist society based on the collective ownership of property.

On the other hand, a large number of artisans were employees rather than



employers—indeed, only ten percent of the masters employed ten or more workers—and these ordinary workers or journeymen appear to have been far more open to radical egalitarian ideas about collective property ownership and cooperative production. Thus, the Parisian working class initially had no coherent, let alone shared concept of association and the “organization of work”; from masters to journeymen to outright unskilled proletarians who were little more than laborers, their demands probably varied considerably.

In the 1830s and 1840s, any attempt to establish a truly collectivist basis for industrial production would have encountered great difficulties. But many French artisans devised ingenious schemes for establishing productive associations of a socialistic kind based on their existing workshops. Hence their earliest calls for a new “organization of work” often came down to demands for shared resources for credit; insurance funds to tide individual artisans over in times of unemployment, illness, and old age; and legislation to protect their small workshops against competition from the growing factory system.

In time, however, and in growing numbers, the most sophisticated worker “militants,” comprising both artisans and journeymen laborers, did seek to collectivize most of the French economy. Many historians of the French labor movement maintain that nineteenth-century French craftsmen were genuine proletarians who were fervently committed to collectivist ideas of socialism based on free associations. Marxist historians, on the other hand, regard most of the Parisian craftsmen as “petty bourgeois” remnants of a preindustrial society, whose “associationist” ideas were based on the private ownership of small-scale property. I have accepted neither viewpoint *in toto* but have tried to steer a middle course between the two. Pace Marx, collectivist goals did emerge among many French artisans after the Revolution of 1830. But these goals were diverse, often confused, and ultimately unworkable within the context of the small-scale production that prevailed in French industry for most of the nineteenth century.

One wing of the collectivist ideology of artisanal socialism called for the nationalization of railroads, banks, and major industrial enterprises, to be managed by the men and women who worked in them. But in the main, French socialists, not to speak of anarchists, were generally more enamored of federalist ideas of association than centralist ones, an affinity that, well into the next century, in conjunction with their commitment to workers’ control of industry, would make them either conscious or intuitive supporters of anarchosindicalism, with its creed of bottom-up industrial management within the framework of libertarian trade unions. Hence the failure of French Marxists to establish a secure basis in the French working class or to consistently abide by Marx’s views, either during or after his lifetime.

Unlike Moss, I have eschewed the appellations “skilled workers” and

"skilled proletarians" in favor of "artisans" and "artisan proletarians." I believe that what distinguished most Parisian workers from the emerging factory proletariat was primarily their characteristically strong sense of personal independence and self-reliance, not simply their possession of skills. Doubtless, the artisans' independent sensibility was reinforced and partly formed by their skills. But theirs was also a culture and community that harked back to an older era, possessed of civic as well as class consciousness. Revolutions are very territorial events: the class antagonisms they express occur within distinctive communities, with their own cafés, civic halls, squares, and even streets as well as workplaces. In France in particular, a revolution would actually consist of many local revolts, each based in a particular neighborhood. Hence the fatal tendency of French workers, especially Parisians, to scatter to barricades in their own neighborhoods during times of insurrection, instead of organizing a citywide and regional coordination against counterrevolutionary military forces.

It had been my hope to encompass this history of the popular movements in the revolutionary era within two volumes. But as my preparation of the second volume continued, it became clear that a third volume would be required. To have limited *The Third Revolution* to only two volumes, I discovered, would have obliged me to omit crucial events, ideas, and developments within the revolutionary tradition. I can only hope that the reader finds that this three-volume book has been worth his or her attention and that it evokes a sense of the great events that are fading from memory today—and the lessons they have to teach present and future generations.

The writing of this volume was very often burdened by the formidable problem of factual discrepancies among the various histories upon which I drew. Many accounts, I found, differed on everything from names to dates to sequences of events, as well as omitting important details of the revolutions at the grassroots level. Not even contemporary eyewitnesses and participants agreed on all the basic facts: Lamartine's and Blanc's histories of the February 1848 Revolution, for example, diverged even on simple details regarding major events. These discrepancies, which recurred again and again, obliged me to consult many memoirs, contemporary documents, and other histories before I felt I could make reasonable judgments and present a responsible picture of these nineteenth-century insurrections. Under such circumstances, errors are difficult to avoid, and I can only hope that any that may persist in the pages that follow are minimal and inconsequential.

I owe my greatest debt in writing volume 2 of *The Third Revolution*, once again, to my companion and colleague, Janet Biehl, who helped immensely with the research and edited the manuscript with great astuteness, care, and dedication. Her enormous support and assistance were indispensable in the preparation of this book.



Several staff members of the Bailey-Howe Library at the University of Vermont in Burlington were also very helpful. Not only did Dean Leary and June Trayah go out of their way to make available books from the library's excellent collection, but Craig Chalone and Rebecca Gould actually brought some of them to my home after their working hours in the dead of a Vermont winter. Being seriously disabled, I could not pick them up myself. Fred G. Hill of the Fletcher Free Library did me a similar kindness and managed to acquire several indispensable but difficult-to-find books through the interlibrary loan system for me. To all of these kind Vermonters, I owe my warmest gratitude. Finally, I wish to express my immense debt to Jane Greenwood, my editor at Cassell, for her generous support for the book, and for making it possible for me to go to a third volume. I also remember with fondness my former editor, Steve Cook, for his interest in and encouragement of the entire project.

Murray Bookchin  
 Burlington, Vermont  
 May 18, 1997

PART V



**THE RISE OF  
ARTISANAL  
SOCIALISM**



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## CHAPTER 22 From Jacobinism to Socialism

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The influence of the French Revolution did not end with the fall of the Robespierrists on July 28, 1794—or, by the revolutionary calendar, with the tenth of Thermidor in Year Two of the Republic. Among a minority of radical conspirators, the Great Revolution, as it came to be called, was to haunt the Napoleonic era and the Bourbon Restoration that followed it. Although it was given a grisly image by the returning monarchy and nobility and clergy as the incarnation of terror and bloody civil war, the Revolution lived on among beleaguered republicans, and later among socialists, as a valiant attempt to create a new era of freedom for the oppressed masses of France and even for humanity as a whole.

Indeed, as I have noted, it remained an imperishable source of lessons for revolutionaries of every kind who, well into the twentieth century, would model their strategies on the attainments and failings of 1789 to 1794. Later generations of revolutionaries would sing the "Marseillaise" as an international hymn at gatherings throughout Europe, and they would employ the term citizen (until it was supplanted by *comrade* among socialists and anarchists) as a form of address in correspondence, manifestos, and public orations well into the nineteenth century. In nearly all Western European countries, self-designated Jacobins were to proclaim a stridently republican ideology and establish Jacobin-type societies.

But some of these societies took their views beyond the expansive principles of legal equality embodied in the "Constitution of '93." They began to demand not only personal equality but economic equality as well, in what came to be known as red republicanism. Such advances over a strictly political Jacobinism consisted of notions of distributive economic justice, according to which wealth was to be equitably shared within the existing system of property ownership.

In this respect, the political and economic outlook of nineteenth-century red republicans did not go much beyond that of the radical English Levellers of two centuries earlier. The good society, according to Levellers and red republicans

alike, was to consist of small-scale producers, such as peasants and artisans, each of whom was entitled to the basic means of life according to traditional principles of "natural law," such as those advocated by Colonel Rainborough in the Putney debates.<sup>4</sup> Economic inequities, radical Levellers and red republicans argued, could be eliminated by sharing the resources of society in a just manner, especially by providing a material competence—commonly, a parcel of land—to every poor man and his family. Every "he," as Rainborough put it, should enjoy the right in a free society to secure a beneficent future as an independent food cultivator or even as a small entrepreneur.

Neither the Levellers nor the red republicans, however, challenged the existence of private property as such. Quite to the contrary, they believed property should be freed of medieval encumbrances that impeded its equitable distribution among the peasantry and the urban poor. What they opposed was the system of privilege, based on birth and the purchase of titles, that formed the social infrastructure of the ancien régime.

These views, of course, were not socialist. They did not call for the collective ownership of property or demand that the products of labor be distributed according to needs. The red republicans, even more decidedly than the Levellers, desired an economically as well as politically equitable society in which artisans, owning their own tools, and peasants, owning their own plots of land, would gain the full rewards of their labor without the exploitation of a propertyless class. In short, they desired a social order that would equalize the ownership of property rather than collectivize it, guaranteeing full economic and political liberty for all.

This basically individualistic system of small-scale production, carefully tuned by a friendly state and/or by cooperatively managed credit institutions to foster equality in the ownership of the means of production, was to become very popular among artisans early in the nineteenth century in Britain and especially in France, whose economy was mainly structured around handicraft production and a peasant agrarian society. Its most famous advocate was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, whose ideas and influence we shall examine in due course.

Inasmuch as many of these French artisans had to cooperate to defend themselves against the invasion of their markets by cheaper factory goods and to find ample credit to tide themselves over difficult times, they early formed associations or corporations for mutual aid. Such corporations were no more socialist in the present-day sense of the word than, for example, contemporary trade unions or credit unions; but the very fact that they seemed like authentic producers' cooperatives easily induced social thinkers in the last century to view them as a form of socialism. And in fact, these corporations often engaged

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<sup>4</sup> See volume 1 of *The Third Revolution*, pp. 112–16.



in many common activities, ranging from the innocently festive to the militantly defensive, that imparted to them a seemingly socialistic character. Indeed, as they became a sort of programmatic movement, with forceful demands for the rectification of serious injustices, they were often pejoratively called socialists. Thus, following the custom of the day, they may conveniently be included under the general rubric of artisanal socialism.

The earliest authentic artisanal socialists, however, were those artisans and theorists who demanded more than the equitable ownership of private property.\* They began to challenge the existence of private property as such, calling for the collective ownership of the means of production wherever feasible. (Prudently and for sound political reasons, these early authentic socialists exempted from collectivization the peasantry, which viewed its ownership of family plots as a sacred right.) As to the distribution of goods produced, these socialists initially believed that the produce of their work should be shared according to the labor contributed by each artisan.

Still other socialists, who by the 1840s were to be called communists, believed in a more ethical system of labor and distribution, one that would avoid the inequities produced by unavoidable differences in individuals' abilities to contribute their labor to the common society and in individuals' needs. Guided by the maxim "From each according to his (or her) abilities, to each according to his (or her) needs," the communists held that a truly egalitarian society had to take full account of the different physical capacities and needs of its members. Accordingly, the distribution of goods should be based not on the labor expended by a worker in the process of production but on the specific needs that he or she had to satisfy—needs that inevitably varied according to the producer's familial and personal responsibilities.

## CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES

During the course of the nineteenth century, the artisanal world of small shops and handicraft production in which these ideas evolved was gradually replaced by the proletarian world of large factories and machine production, giving rise to

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\* For a fuller discussion of artisanal socialism, see Chapter 24. As G.D.H. Cole observes, the word socialism in the early nineteenth century acquired a family of meanings. Minimally, it meant "collective regulation of men's affairs on a cooperative basis." Socialists at that time might make no reference to class conflict, for example, and "they all attacked the undue inequality of property and income and they demanded the regulation and limitation of property rights"—which did not necessarily mean its abolition. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 1: *The Forerunners* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 4-5.

a class of mainly unskilled machine operatives. Given the emergence of factories that were too large to be owned by a single craftsman, socialism had to change its "scale," so to speak. Socialist ideologies appeared that emphasized the integration of production on a regional and national level. Socialization soon began to mean the complete takeover of the economy either by the state (nationalization) or by worker-controlled, confederally organized trade unions (syndicalism). Particularly after the Paris Commune of 1871, artisanal socialism steadily gave way, albeit never completely, to proletarian socialism, with corresponding changes in the forms of organization that workers favored and by which their revolutionary leaders hoped to change society.

The strategies that artisanal and proletarian socialists used in their struggles for social change commonly stood in marked contrast to each other. Aside from their corporations, artisans normally belonged to clubs and often to secret societies. They tended to denigrate parliamentary activity, even where they were allowed to vote, and turned to direct action in the form of crowd assaults against the police and military. In periods of serious crisis, they often reared barricades and engaged in outright insurrection. Their organizations were generally transitory; they appeared and disappeared with changes in political and economic conditions.

By contrast, proletarians tended to form trade unions and political parties. When major social crises produced insurrectionary situations, and even in periods of social revolution, industrial workers generally functioned through mass parties, labor unions, and councils, which were often extensions of their coordinating strike committees. Where artisans built barricades, proletarians created paramilitary organizations. Where artisans tended to confine their insurrections to their own neighborhoods, proletarians, united by their factories, rose on a citywide, regional, and national scale, preceded by general strikes that in some cases paralyzed an entire country. These differences in strategy and forms of organization between artisans and proletarians, to be sure, were by no means ironclad. As early as the 1820s, and especially in the 1830s, French artisans took recourse not only to insurrections but to strikes on an increasing scale, and they organized trade unions as well as clubs to pursue their ends. Nor did they eschew the use of political organizations to elect deputies to parliamentary bodies.

But the transition from artisanal to proletarian socialism belongs to a later chapter. In the early nineteenth century artisanal socialists had yet to decipher such problems as their relationship to the ruling elites of their time, the nature of exploitation, and the role of classes in creating a new society. Their theorists viewed the formation of a cooperative world almost entirely as a problem of moral suasion. They were convinced that the wealthy had to be persuaded by ethical arguments to foster the various socialistic schemes that abounded after the French Revolution. The good offices of the rich and powerful, they believed, were necessary to bring



about social change—hence the importance of offering compelling examples of cooperative living and production as a means to gain the backing of elites.

Obviously, this view of social change discouraged the spread of class consciousness, still less notions of class struggle. In the eyes of early socialist theorists, the old and new potentates of the world were expected to lend their support and wisdom to the innovation of socialistic schemes that in fact were expressly opposed to their interests. Various socialist theorists even tried to find a place for the old elites in their new world, whether as the financiers of socialist projects, administrators of socialist schemes, or even as the potential leaders of a socialist society. Hence the early socialist theorists emphasized not class struggle but one or another form of class reconciliation—where the existence of class exploitation was acknowledged at all.

Thus, with such amiable views toward the wealthy and powerful, the utmost confusion existed among early socialists about how the owners of private property acquired their profits. Did they do it by overcharging consumers? By exacting interest from borrowers who needed credit to buy raw materials and pay wages? By working their hired laborers to the limits of their physical endurance (an explanation that conflicted with the desire of many socialist theorists to foster class harmony)? By reaping surpluses from sound agricultural practices? Or simply as just rewards for their contribution to the productive process? These were some of the more popular notions that the economists of the day floated for public consideration and that many early socialists incorporated into their analyses.

The ideological transition from Jacobinism to socialism was greatly complicated by republican myths and conspiratorial organizations. The prevailing radical ideology during the Bourbon Restoration, especially in the 1820s, was still republican—and in many countries it remained so for the rest of the century. Monarchies and aristocracies still appeared as the principal obstacles to political reform, as they would up to the First World War. The distinction between republican and socialist aims was not as immediately clear, at that time, as it is in retrospect. The largely republican rhetoric of the French Revolution colored the oratory and literature of red republicans and socialists alike. Indeed, for a time the two movements engaged together in the same uprisings and conspiracies and their members often belonged to the same secret societies.

Adding to the confusion, some minimally socialistic ideas could be coaxed out of the Great Revolution itself. Saint-Just's proposal, in Ventôse (February and March) 1794, that the property of "recognized enemies" of the republic be sequestered and distributed among "indigent patriots," later seemed like a socialistic willingness to redistribute property. But these Ventôse Laws, which the Convention enacted some four months before their sponsor was brought to the guillotine, proved unworkable, especially since enormous difficulties stood

in the way of determining which enemies were "recognized" and which patriots were "indigent." Nor were these laws socialistic in nature: they involved a simple transfer of property from a very limited number of "enemies" to a very large number of poor, which left only a pittance to each eligible patriot. The Ventôse Laws could better be regarded as a form of charity for the impoverished masses.

Far more socialistic in nature were the demands of Gracchus Babeuf and his supporters who formed the "the Conspiracy of the Equals" during the spring of 1796, in the wake of the Great Revolution. The "Manifesto of the Equals," written in April by Sylvain Maréchal as a definitive statement of their aims, represented a sharp discontinuity with the French Revolution, even as it resonated with all the Jacobin verbal flourishes of 1793. "The French Revolution is only the herald of another revolution," declared Maréchal in the spirited language of the time, one "far greater, far more solemn, which will be the last of them all." The Constitution of 1793, the manifesto concluded, "was a great *de facto* step toward real equality, never had anything come so near to real equality. Yet even this latter Constitution did not reach the goal and bring about the common welfare, the great principle of which it nevertheless solemnly consecrated."

Giving reality to this "great principle," according to the manifesto, would involve nothing less than creating a "REPUBLIC OF EQUALS," in which all discrepancies of wealth would be abolished by establishing "the COMMUNITY OF GOODS! No more individual ownership of land: *the land belongs to no one*. We are demanding, we desire, communal enjoyment of the fruits of the earth: *the fruits belong to all*."<sup>1</sup>

This was heady language indeed. If doubts remain among historians of socialism that the Babouvists demanded the eventual abolition of propertyed society, they may be dispelled by Babeuf's own defense at his trial, after the Babouvist conspiracy was betrayed and its leaders arrested. As Babeuf read into his trial record passages from his periodical, *Tribune of the People*, he unequivocally asserted:

The sole means of arriving at [the Republic of Equals] is to establish a common administration; to suppress private property; to place every man of talent in the line of work he knows best; to oblige him to deposit the fruit of his work in the common store, to establish a simple administration of needs, which, keeping a record of all individuals and all the things that are available to them, will distribute these available goods with the most scrupulous equality, and will see to it that they make their way into the home of every citizen.<sup>2</sup>

But Babeuf's appeal for socialism and even communism was stillborn; after the suppression of the conspiracy, these ideas fell victim to the social and



political amnesia that gripped most of France during the Napoleonic and Restoration years. It was not until the 1830s, more than a generation after Babeuf was executed by the Thermidorian Directory, that socialism arose in Europe as a lasting concept, and even then the word socialism was not minted in the country of the Great Revolution—rather, it first appeared in print in England in 1827, in a periodical committed to Robert Owen's vision of a new society. During the Restoration, from 1815 to 1830, French radicals were still largely occupied with various neo-Jacobin republican conspiracies against the Bourbons.

Although Babeuf's conspiracy was largely forgotten after its leaders were executed or imprisoned, one of the last surviving Babouvists, Philippe Buonarroti, published in 1828 a two-volume documentary history of the Conspiracy of Equals—the *Histoire de la conspiration pour l'égalité, dite de Babeuf*—that catapulted the plot and its drama into public attention and stimulated the development of revolutionary socialist ideas in France, in contrast to the tamer notions that artisanal and similar socialist theorists were propagating. Buonarroti, a fiery Italian of noble ancestry, had been caught up in the Great Revolution while studying law in Paris and was granted French citizenship by the Convention in 1793. Although he subsequently became involved in the Babeuf conspiracy, he was spared the guillotine after its suppression and was imprisoned. Eventually he went into exile in Geneva, but he remained a volatile insurrectionary whose ideas melded old political *enragé* sentiments with new artisanal socialistic ideas. For nearly thirty years, the massive cultural and political backlash against revolutionary activity notwithstanding, he actively participated in Italian and French republican conspiracies.

Buonarroti lived long enough to gain the awe of young romantic revolutionaries of all kinds—republican and nationalist as well as socialist—as they began to proliferate once again in the late 1820s. His book may not have been the kindling that fed the socialistic fire that burned in the breast of French youth, but it was almost certainly the spark that set it alight. By the time of his death in 1837, he had played a major role in transforming the simple Jacobinism of many of his young followers into the vigorous revolutionary socialism of Babeuf and his supporters that stressed insurrection and class war. Indeed, before he died, Buonarroti would see the tricolor of the First Republic replaced by the red flag of socialism in the streets of Lyon and Paris.

## LABORIST RADICALISM IN BRITAIN

To the socialist ideologies that were percolating in France in the early nineteenth century, British radicals added a new and more theoretically

sophisticated dimension. In the 1790s many self-styled Jacobins in England had demonstratively hailed the French Revolution from across the Channel, but Britain's own first steps toward socialism were drawn from uniquely English sources, reflecting a significantly different economic and social dispensation.

Where early French economic theorists such as the Physiocrats, living in a predominantly agrarian and preindustrial society, appropriately regarded agriculture as the source of value and material surpluses, British economic theorists, faced with an era of industrial growth, adopted a labor theory of value. So pervasive was this orientation in English economic theory that many economists in Britain may properly be called "laborists," as George Lichtheim called them.<sup>3</sup> The centrality that English economics gave to labor can be traced from William Petty in the late seventeenth century to Adam Smith in the eighteenth, but it was David Ricardo a generation later, living in the full tide of the Industrial Revolution, who drew from laborist theories their broad social and economic implications.

The notion that labor is the source of all "wealth," as the laborist theorists put it, could lead to very radical conclusions. By enhancing the centrality of the worker, laborist theory gained a tremendous explanatory power that was more appropriate for socialist ideas than earlier, more simplistic notions. Indeed, before Ricardo, English socialism had been little more than a moral theory that enjoined the exploited and their exploiters to behave with a decent regard for each other's needs. This largely subjectivistic approach nourished very naive and reformist notions of social change. Most "utopian socialists," as later generations of socialists would call them, were content to appeal to employers, the state, and even despots to institute various reforms and gradualist strategies, often in ways that were simply patronizing to the "lower orders" and in awe of their social "betters."

Ricardo, who as a man of wealth was anything but a social radical, imparted to the labor theory of value a degree of theoretical consistency that none of his predecessors had achieved. Not only did he conceive of labor as a commodity, much like any other commodity on the market, but he cast the labor theory of value in terms of *subsistence*. As a commodity, he said, a worker's labor was worth no more than the minimum costs of maintaining that worker in everyday life and of reproducing future workers for the production of agrarian and industrial commodities (leaving aside wage fluctuations that may arise from supply and demand and other factors). To use Ricardo's own formulations in his pivotal 1817 work, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, the "natural price" of labor is precisely what is "necessary to enable the labourers, one with another, to subsist and to perpetuate their race, without either increase or diminution." Hence the value of labor—that is, the wages to which laborers are entitled—depends "on the quantity of food, necessities, and conveniences [that] become essential to him from habit."<sup>4</sup>



Followed to its logical conclusion, this "iron law of wages," as it came to be called, meant that poverty was a systemic—and endemic—condition of capitalist society. Poverty, in effect, was caused not merely by the greed of the rich; it stemmed above all from compelling laws of the marketplace, including those described in Malthusian theory that maintain that surplus population always drives wages down to the barest minimum needed to keep the labor force alive.

Although socialists were very critical of Ricardo's implicit justification for the existence of poverty, his subsistence theory of wages provided them with the means by which they could construct a highly impressive case against capitalism. Without abandoning their moral condemnation of the self-seeking bourgeoisie, especially as the Industrial Revolution and all its horrors began to crest in Britain, they could now support their demands for a complete reordering of society along cooperative lines by pointing to trends inherent within capitalism as such. Armed with this analysis, socialists influenced by Ricardo's labor theory, or "left Ricardians," could now demystify the hidden nature of capitalist exploitation. They could dispel the characteristic claim of capitalists to the profits that accrued in their factories and banks as a form of fairly earned "remuneration"—the "wages" of capital—for the services they provided to the economy. Ricardo's laborist theory created the basis for understanding that wage labor, as a distinct social relationship between the capitalist and the proletarian, was not only exploitative but necessarily resulted in the impoverishment, indeed the destitution, of the industrial worker.

Even among radicals who had studied Ricardo's works, to be sure, these ideas remained somewhat hazy: they were not to be fully clarified until Marx brilliantly synthesized English economic theory with French socialist ideas, while in France itself, no such argument existed until these theories crossed the Channel. But awareness, among early British socialists, of the unique features of capitalism was growing, as a result of new economic developments. Far more than any country in the early part of the century, Britain was witnessing a steady erosion in the status of traditional artisans, the substitution of machines for handwork, and the undermining of the family cottage industry by the factory system—in short, the Industrial Revolution. Unavoidably, these basic changes in British society—and the searingly harsh social conditions they generated—obliged early British socialists to transcend the political limits of Jacobinism. But it was above all the early appearance of the Industrial Revolution in England that profoundly influenced the rise of socialism, and not only at home, where its impact—the degradation of the proletariat—was immediate, but in time on the continent, where capitalist social relations were poised to penetrate as well, wreaking a similar transformation on continental working classes.

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: ENGLAND

England is justly cited by most historians as the country of origin for the Industrial Revolution, since it was here that most of the technological innovations were developed that laid the basis for the factory system and rationalized forms of large-scale agriculture. Beginning with James Watt's sophistication of the steam engine, they eventually transformed the entire structure of social life both in Britain and on the continent. But the Industrial Revolution was not only a process of mechanization of production: it also meant the rise of capitalist social relations, which had already begun before mechanization, when relatively independent cottage workers, using fairly traditional tools and machines, were grouped together into sheds or factories (so named after the traveling "factors," who provided them with raw materials and bought up their semifinished goods) so that their output and working hours could be regulated. A large cottage industry of artisans was to coexist with these factories well into the nineteenth century, but other processes were under way that would finally transform the nature of production in the modern world.

Any account of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the revolutionary tradition must draw a clear distinction between the striking technological innovations that made the Industrial Revolution possible, and the actual changes that industrialization brought into the everyday lives of ordinary people. Although technical innovations were obviously necessary for the emergence of an industrial capitalist economy, their impact on society itself was often very uneven—an unevenness that partly explains the varying tensions that pervaded the entire era. The discovery of a new technique, it is important to note, was not immediately followed by its application to industry. Often a considerable lag existed between a technological discovery and its practical use in the economy. Because of this lag, the "proletarianization" of the preindustrial artisan world was often relatively slow—providing time for the emergence of widespread and often stormy resistance to the factory system.

The development of new machines, well beyond the resources of the artisan and too large to be used effectively in cottages, began modestly. In 1733 John Kay invented the so-called flying shuttle, a simple device that made it possible for a cotton weaver to produce twice as much cloth as a single individual could. Thereafter necessity clearly became the mother of invention, as each innovation in the textile industry created a major disequilibrium in the various stages of cloth production. Kay's flying shuttle, for example, created an enormous demand for thread, a demand that could not be satisfied until new techniques for spinning became available. A full thirty years later, in 1764, this disparity was still only partly resolved when James Hargreaves designed a simple spinning jenny that could turn eight spindles instead of the single spindle of



the traditional spinning wheel. Five more years then had to pass before Richard Arkwright, in 1769, patented the water-powered spinning frame, which, based on the rotary motion of two sets of rollers, could produce a finer and tighter thread. The water frame allowed for the use of as many as four hundred spindles, which could produce inexpensively in England the fine handspun yarn and cloth that fashion-conscious Britons had previously had to import from India.

It was not until a decade later that Hargreaves's spinning jenny and Arkwright's water frame were improved still further by Samuel Crompton's spinning mule in 1779. Now the English textile industry had a surplus of thread but not enough mechanized weavers to turn it into cloth. Until mechanized weaving machines came into use, mechanically spun thread was still woven by artisans using handlooms. Indeed, the intervals between each successive but partial technical innovation were filled by using the labor of many traditional artisans and cottage workers. Small producers who wholly or partly finished machine-produced commodities were thus long indispensable to the operations of large mills. Some six years after Crompton, in 1785, Edmund Cartwright finally patented the power loom, which, after important refinements, laid the basis for the mechanization of the entire cotton cloth industry.

None of these inventions could have been sufficient to assure England's industrial hegemony if the prime mover had been only water power, an unreliable source of energy that limited factory sites to streams that were often remote from commercial centers and ports. This crucial problem was ultimately resolved by James Watt's modern steam engine, patented in 1769, which in time was to become the pulsating heart of factories, locomotives, and steamships. Yet Watt's steam engine was still too inefficient and fragile, even decades after it had been invented, to completely free factories from their reliance on water power. Indeed, many of the eighteenth-century inventions, in their original form, were very cumbersome and crude and constantly in need of repair. Mining operations were plagued by flooded pits, and cheap steel long remained unavailable, despite improvements in smelting.

Not until the next century did further improvements, especially more sophisticated techniques of instrumentation, make these innovations eminently feasible and economically predominant. Indeed, it was not until the 1830s, a century after Kay's flying shuttle and some sixty years after Watt's steam engine, that modern industry in England finally arrived. By that decade more than 270,000 operatives were producing cotton goods, many in factories in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Still another generation had to pass before the new system crowded out nearly all handworkers and cottage producers—by which time England had earned its title "the workshop of the world."

The technological changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution

produced major changes in the class configuration of England as well. For some four or five generations before the Industrial Revolution triumphed, the traditional working class had been divided among masters, journeymen, and apprentices: now it underwent a sweeping metamorphosis. "Workers" included not only artisans (preindustrial journeymen as well as masters), who worked in fairly small installations with tools and hand-operated machines, but industrial workers who were unskilled adjuncts of huge, highly rationalized, capital-intensive factories, closely supervised by foremen and managers.

Although both artisans and proletarians were regarded as workers and although both assumed the name *proletarians* (particularly in France), their interests, behavioral patterns, and degree of militancy diverged markedly. Generally artisans, working outside the industrial environment, had a certain latitude in determining their working hours, and they enjoyed a degree of independence in producing a fairly complete product—imparting to them a sense of craftsmanship and pride that was denied to factory proletarians. Not surprisingly, these artisans opposed the encroaching industrial system with a militancy that was rare among early factory proletarians, many of whom were more subdued and deferential toward factory owners.

A similar differentiation occurred within the "bourgeoisie." Initially meaning "burgher" or city dweller, the word *bourgeois* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was increasingly applied to professionals, merchants, financiers, and well-to-do retailers who enjoyed a comfortable income and held property—especially land—in amounts that now set them apart from ordinary city dwellers. Within even this fairly amorphous category, the Industrial Revolution slowly produced another cleavage. The new industrial class, which more appropriately should be called *capitalists*, began to develop interests that were separate from—indeed, in collision with—those of the traditional bourgeoisie. The term *bourgeois* was thus more appropriately applied to nonindustrial upper classes—until a capitalist ruling class with shared social interests emerged that encompassed financiers and merchants as well as industrialists.\*

These distinctions are far from semantic quibbles. The social metabolism of the early nineteenth century was profoundly guided by struggles between craftsmen, landed bourgeois, merchants, proletarians, and industrial capitalists.

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\* In this connection, Marx and Engels, in their early writings, used a vocabulary that was more anticipatory of future developments than it was applicable in their day. In the mid-nineteenth century on the continent, artisans predominated in manufacturing and industrial proletarians were still comparatively rare, yet Marx often used the word *proletarian* to refer to the working class even when it was still artisanal. By the same token, he used the word *bourgeoisie* even at a time when the "bourgeoisie" was more invested in land than in industry. In the 1870s, especially after his fights with the followers of Proudhon, Marx used these terms with greater discrimination.



As new situations arose, these strata variously worked with each other at some times and opposed each other at other times. By the end of the century, when artisans had all but disappeared as an important productive force in England and Germany, the words *bourgeois* and *capitalist* came to denote a broad but single social group—such as factory owners, bankers, and large commercial wholesalers and retailers—whose interests were not only basically shared but organically interlocked.

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

On the continent, the lag in industrialization, producing uneven levels of technology in the various stages of production, was even more marked than in England. Where, by 1810, England could boast of possessing some five thousand steam engines, for example, France had only two hundred. Comparable divergences in mechanization applied to nearly all branches of French industry. Generally, too, in the replacement of cottage and artisanal production by the factory system, France lagged far behind England. In the England of 1850, for example, nearly a quarter of a million power looms were in operation, compared with about 40,000 handlooms; in 1848 in France, by contrast, despite its substantially larger population, there were only 31,000 power looms. (Nonetheless, France had a large textile output, which suggests that French handlooms—whose scale we can only guess at because of the decentralized nature of cottage production—were enormously productive.)

To be sure, France, like England, had a number of large industrial installations. The multistoried British factories like the Boulton and Watt engine works were matched by the Le Creusot foundries as early as the 1790s. But if small firms and cottage production lingered precariously in Britain even until the middle of the nineteenth century, they remained dominant in France, and for a much longer period of time. The hand production of garments and luxury items that gave French goods their worldwide reputation for artistry and quality played a major economic role even into the twentieth century.

The marked lag in the spread of factories in France by comparison with Britain is accountable partly, perhaps decisively, by what Tom Kemp has aptly called "the essential paradox of nineteenth-century France."<sup>5</sup> As a result of the Great Revolution, France had one of the most individualistic political and juridical systems in Europe—which, other things being equal, should have supplied an enormous impetus to the rise of industrial capitalism there. Yet the same Revolution, by removing the feudal burdens on agriculture and contributing to a widespread redistribution of land, also furnished the material underpinnings for one of the most self-sufficient peasantries in Western

Europe. By its very self-sufficiency, this peasantry closed off much of France's domestic market to factory-made goods, creating little incentive for the mass production of commodities such as textiles, leather products, and the like.

To exacerbate the situation, the very individual rights that the Revolution had expanded "confirmed the peasant custom of [land] division on inheritance," Kemp notes, "and thus prevented the development of a really individualist agriculture over the country as a whole." The inheritance clauses of the revolutionary and Napoleonic civil codes

contributed to *morcelement* [parcelizing] of the peasants' lands where they did not encourage the limitation of family size. No doubt they helped to conserve the peasantry, albeit at a low standard of living, but at the price of impeding the expansion of the internal market and the creation of an urban, industrial proletariat.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, despite the seemingly "bourgeois" revolution of 1789-94, French industrial capitalists actually found themselves at a considerable disadvantage with respect to their English competitors, whose government was engaged in a frenzy of land enclosures that virtually destroyed the British peasantry, leaving "deserted villages" in their wake. French industrial capitalism was significantly impeded by the very revolution that has been described as classically bourgeois.

Nor was the French bourgeoisie itself disposed to foster industrial development along British lines. In the early nineteenth century the big bourgeoisie, largely centered in Paris, continued to expend its funds on the purchase of land, on mortgages and state bonds, and on monetary speculation, to the general neglect of the industrial economy. Still predominantly agrarian, the French economy was hidebound by tradition—parochial, craft-oriented, and above all, fixated on the value of land—the very traits that had marked the economy of the *ancien régime*. As for the expansion of the internal market and the overcoming of regional isolation, few statistics highlight the differences between England and France in these years better than the numbers for railway mileage laid down. In 1843 British rails extended for 2,036 miles, compared with only 268 miles in France—a nearly tenfold difference that remained significantly undiminished for decades. The extent to which regional distinctions, so pronounced in the preindustrial era of both countries, were diminished by industrialization and by railroads strongly affected the kinds of socialist ideas and practices that would develop on each side of the Channel.



## BRITAIN'S SOCIALIST TRAJECTORY

Economic factors alone, to be sure, cannot account for the differences in the socialist movements that emerged in Britain and France: political traditions, the flexibility of existing institutions, and the cultural élan of the laboring classes had significant effects as well. But the role of economic factors should not be underrated.

Reaching unprecedented peaks early in the century, British land enclosures produced a labor force that was inchoate and demoralized, one that eventually fell prey to ruthless exploitation on the part of fiercely competitive factory owners. In England itself, between 1800 and 1820, about 300,000 acres of open land, on which many villagers depended for wood and pasturage, were enclosed, leaving incalculable numbers of rural folk at the mercy of industrial capitalists. The labor force that entered the new English factories was thus made up of broken people, disheartened by the loss not only of their homes but of the traditional protections that had once been supplied by the landed nobility and by guilds. Like the independent artisanal handworkers who were faced with extinction by power-driven machinery, the new industrial proletariat was caught in the harsh tension between a rationalized factory system and the more organic lifeways, however miserable they had been materially, of preindustrial village society.

Cannily, British industrial capitalists exploited the weaknesses of this proletariat by playing its religious and gender differences against each other. About twenty percent of the new English proletariat was composed of Irish peasants who had fled devastating economic conditions in their own country. Acrimony flared up easily between Irish Catholics and English Protestants, despite the misery that both groups shared in factories and slums. Such differences kept proletarians sufficiently divided among themselves that their potential to unite in opposition to their employers was, for a time, diverted into mutual hatred—until class consciousness began to dilute the malice English workers harbored toward “foreigners” and “papists.”

Moreover, an estimated three-quarters of the factory labor force was made up of women and children. Socially vulnerable and relatively docile, these groups could be reduced to submission to factory owners with relative ease. No section of the working population, during the entire Industrial Revolution, was more ruthlessly exploited and more effectively controlled by the industrial bourgeoisie. Female workers, generally intimidated by their employers, could be hired instead of militant males inclined to trade union organizing. Children, for similar reasons, were worked to exhaustion, growing up into an adult generation physically weak and deformed by rickets. So warped were their bodies that they unnerved even the ruling classes, who required a supply of physically able recruits, not only for England's factories but for its military forces as well.

The more independent artisans, still rooted in the cultural lifeways of the preindustrial past, were far less accepting of their deteriorating social condition than these industrial workers. Riots and near-insurrections over food shortages and social abuses were their typical forms of protest. Even strikes began to occur, although they were to become more characteristic of industrial than artisanal workers. The skilled keelmen of Newcastle went on strike as early as 1750, as did London tailors a year later, both actions lasting several weeks. In 1753 in Manchester, carpenters, joiners, and bricklayers—that is to say, artisans—as well as construction laborers engaged in a work stoppage for higher wages, even raising money to defend their imprisoned leaders. Above all, great hunger riots swept over Britain in 1795–96, marked by virtual insurrections and attacks on the person of the king in London, led by craftspeople whose belligerency was redolent of the waning noncapitalistic world.

Other artisan revolts were more organized. The stormy Luddite movement, which tried to preserve old artisanal lifeways by damaging new labor-saving machines, was initiated mainly by cottage lace and hosiery workers in the Midlands, spreading to croppers and cotton weavers in 1811–12. These artisans and cottagers were hardly a riotous crowd but were made up of a number of well-organized groups who secretly directed their activities against carefully selected industrial targets. During the summer of 1812 the government had to station more than 12,000 troops in places where machine-breaking disturbances and riots had occurred. After a brief hiatus late in 1813, the movement resumed, panicking industrial capitalists into fears of a well-organized insurrection. Not until a major trial in York Castle was their movement effectively put down, resulting in the hanging of twenty of their leaders and the penal transportation of seven to Australia.

Such behavior and values, as Gwyn A. Williams so perceptively concludes, were essentially *pre-industrial* in a deeper sense than the merely technical.

"Long have we been endeavoring to find ourselves men," said the sailors of the British fleet in 1797. "We now find ourselves so. We will be treated as such." They learned this tone from others. The first *political* statement of this instinct was made by men who, however poor, could not conceive of themselves as [factory] "hands" or a "labour force," men with the dignity of a skill and the mystery of a craft, men who polished tools and knew the "fine points," men whose wage was a "selling price" and whose property was labour, men whose values, even in adversity, were fixed by an earned independence. The statement, once made, was universal—since, to quote another of them—"a man's a man for a' that"—but its origin should not be overlooked. This is the central truth. . . . The ideology of democracy was pre-industrial and its first serious practitioners were artisans.<sup>7</sup>



Which is not to say that the new industrial proletariat was completely passive in the face of the terrible abuses inflicted upon it. The first "modern" industrial strike seems to have occurred in 1810, when Manchester cotton spinners left their factories by the thousands—disbursing among themselves, for their subsistence, £1,500 a week in strike funds that they had accumulated. It was a harbinger of later strikes that were to sweep up industrial proletarians in great movements for higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working conditions. Yet at the beginning of the century the English industrial proletariat was already making itself felt, opening expectations that would make it the focus of socialist ideology for several generations.

Nevertheless, neither the industrial proletariat nor the artisan craftworkers in England challenged the existing structure of society as such, despite the attempts of many radical theorists to impute such aims to them. In the wake of Cromwell's rule, the ruling classes in Britain had developed a sufficient degree of institutional flexibility to keep mass movements under control, their willingness to use force against rebels notwithstanding. The great movements of the English working classes, including Luddism, were effectively contained within the parliamentary system—to an extent that comparable movements in France were not. Unlike monarchical government in France, parliamentary government in England always held out the prospect that it could be reformed to benefit the poor and disenfranchised, with the result that any social or political upheaval, far from intensifying into a revolutionary situation, could ultimately be settled by compromise. In the 1790s the landed classes, in an attempt to keep the rural poor from migrating to the cities, agreed at Speenhamland to provide a basic, albeit meager income to the most underprivileged residents of the countryside. This measure, which remained in effect for decades, did not prevent all hungry and dispossessed villagers from migrating to the new industrial towns. But by providing a semblance of patronal concern and by giving traditional rural society an extended lease on life, it helped keep revolt in abeyance.

The Chartist movement and its outcome exemplify this containment of popular opposition. Adopted in 1838 by the London Workingmen's Association, the People's Charter raised basic demands for reforms like universal manhood suffrage, payment for members of Parliament, a secret ballot, fairly divided electoral districts, the abolition of property qualifications for membership in the House, and annual parliaments—demands that more or less had already been granted in the United States.

Support for the Chartist movement came from almost every sector of the English working class—factory workers as well as artisans, laborers as well as intellectuals, clerks as well as alchouse proprietors. The movement had a certain volatility, and some of its actions took threatening forms: in July 1839, after the House of Commons rejected the Charter despite the million and a

quarter signatures attached to it, the ensuing popular anger generated riots, strikes, and even local uprisings. Talk of outright civil war was rife but not frightening enough to prevent the House from rejecting a second Chartist petition in 1842. In April 1848—itsself a year of armed insurrection on the continent—a plan to present Chartist demands to Parliament in yet another great petition, accompanied by a mass demonstration, generated a veritable panic among the ruling classes. Expecting hundreds of thousands of Chartists to all but invade London, they proceeded to turn the capital into an armed camp. A large civilian constabulary was recruited from the middle classes; the aged Duke of Wellington was entrusted with the command of an army to defend the city; and even the queen was spirited off to the Isle of Wight for protection against the anticipated insurrection.

But the panic, as it turned out, was unfounded. Since its high point in the early 1840s, the Chartist movement had actually been waning. In advance of the 1848 effort, its leaders were sharply divided over strategy, and the relatively small crowd that massed to present the petition was patently intimidated by the government's enormous show of force. The middle-class elements who had formerly supported the Chartists had by now turned their attention to other pressing issues, especially an effort to abolish the Corn Laws, which had been enacted in 1815 to restrict the importation of corn in the interests of the landed classes, but which were keeping domestic food prices and wages inordinately high. Industrial workers, for their part, had shifted from Charter agitation to the formation of trade unions (which the repeal of the Combination Acts had permitted) as the most promising means for achieving their material goals. Finally, the artisans, newly harnessed by the industrial system, were turning to peaceful forms of action to preserve their waning status and lifeways.

In fact, a strong *prima facie* case can be made for correlating the rise of Chartism with worsening economic conditions, and its ebb with material improvements. It was when the price of corn increased enormously in 1838 and when a severe depression developed in 1842 that Chartism became a major force, as working-class fury reached near-insurrectionary proportions—only to wane during the intervening years and virtually fade away after 1846, when bread-and-butter trade unionism began to supplant Chartist influence among the proletariat.

Moreover, even as Parliament was using a firm stick to intimidate the Chartist movement, it was also offering the working classes a carrot in the form of ameliorative labor legislation. In 1844 a Tory parliament passed a law reducing the working time of children between the ages of eight and thirteen to six and a half hours daily. Young people between thirteen and eighteen could not work more than eleven hours, and child and female labor was prohibited completely in mines. Three years later a ten-hour working day for everyone was enacted, making English labor legislation among the most advanced in the



world. Factory inspectors were appointed to oversee working conditions, issuing reports that would gain a reputation for an unprecedented critical frankness. In the years that followed, the middle classes and ever larger sectors of the working class gained the franchise. Apart from a few flare-ups—which themselves never seriously threatened the social order—the English proletariat was ultimately domesticated.

The trajectory of English socialist movements was no more revolutionary than Chartism. Socialist proletarians and artisans put their efforts into the formation of cooperatives, benefit and educational societies, and conventional trade unions rather than the fomenting of insurrections. Later generations of socialists pinned their hopes on the formation of the Labour Party, which professed to seek a socialistic society by electoral means. Nonetheless, before English socialism was entirely tamed, many early English socialists and their anarchist affines were committed to less parliamentary approaches. In October 1833 delegates to a Cooperative Congress in London, called by Robert Owen to unite the cooperative and trade union movements, flirted with the formation of a "Grand National Moral Union of the Productive Classes" (the presence of the word "Moral" is worth noting) and with waging a general strike as a means to achieve a cooperative society. In the same month a meeting of Glasgow workers endorsed a resolution for a general strike in terms that Harry W. Laidler calls "like a modern syndicalist manifesto."<sup>8</sup>

But the strike plan they discussed was not general in any syndicalist sense; on the contrary, it was intermittent and fragmentary. Workers would set aside some of their income, and when they had accumulated sufficient funds to cover their living expenses for an extra week or month, they would remain at home for that period of time. Afterward they would return to work, repeating the same alternating sequence of work and idleness. This "direct action" was intended to eventually reduce capitalism to a shambles. Laidler's opinion of its militancy notwithstanding, the notion was naïve and never carried out. Later, a more resolute notion of a "Grand National Holiday" of one month's duration would capture the imagination of many Chartists, who actually managed to bring out workers for several days on the "holiday." But the strike had no staying power, nor did it assume national dimensions. Following harsh persecution by the authorities and a lack of conventional trade union support, the effort—and the idea of a general strike—fizzled out.

For all his single-mindedness and idealism, the great "utopian socialist" Robert Owen was by no means a firebrand. He resolutely opposed the notions of class conflict that were percolating through the English working class. Initially a textile manufacturer, he had introduced sweeping reforms in his factory at New Lanark to show that capitalism could be managed beneficently and humanely, while still making a profit—and New Lanark quickly became a showplace for visiting statesmen and industrialists. In his



later endeavors he hoped to create a new society structured around "villages of cooperation." As Owen envisioned it, these self-sufficient "villages," initially peopled by the unemployed, would combine agriculture with industry to produce for members' needs and then exchange their surpluses with one another in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. In time, he hoped, the "villages" would peacefully replace capitalism and its industrial installations, opening an era of harmony and brotherly love. Owen even tried to gain governmental assistance to realize his plan, which, needless to say, was not forthcoming.

Although he devoted the rest of his life to realizing this essentially preindustrial vision of a new society, none of his practical schemes succeeded—least of all his attempt to finance, establish, and maintain a utopian community in the United States. Yet his tireless efforts to improve the condition of the working class made him, for a time, the indubitable leader of early English trade unionism, while his propaganda on behalf of cooperatives helped inspire various communitarian movements that flourished well into the next century, both at home and abroad. (In the late twentieth century Owen's cooperative vision continues to be recycled by communitarians who appear to know nothing of the "villages of cooperation" or the lessons to be drawn from their failure.)

For the rest of the nineteenth century, British socialism proliferated into a variety of tendencies: guild socialism, with its emphasis on localism; Fabian socialism, with its emphasis on gradualism and education; and even a small Marxian socialist tendency and a fairly respectable anarchist scene. But all of them culminated in the creation of a parliamentary labor movement of sizable proportions. As for the laborist ideas of David Ricardo and the socialists who had drawn out their radical implications, they were absorbed into the synthesis produced by Marx, whose economics were far more Ricardian than many of his supporters acknowledged.

Ironically, the greatest single achievement of English socialism—or at least the English radical milieu—was the work of an exiled German who, ensconced in the British Museum, produced a masterpiece, *Capital*, that profoundly shaped socialism in most of the world—except, perhaps, in Britain. The passing of the artisans—and with them their strong sense of independence, their sometimes benign traditional lifeways, and their commitment to a moral economy—had done much to devalue the British working classes and steer them toward parliamentary solutions for social problems. Idealistic social goals were consistently replaced with pragmatic reforms to limit working hours in factories, expand the franchise, and allow for trade unions and a social democratic labor party. In England it was ultimately in parliamentary legislation that social changes were registered.

## THE FRENCH SOCIALIST TRAJECTORY

In France, by contrast, social changes were ultimately registered in armed insurrections that, even as failures, left a legacy of radical idealism with enormous international influence.

From an ideological and emotional standpoint, the foremost fact about French socialism was the drama of the Great Revolution itself. Haunting every aspect of Gallic political life—reactionary as well as revolutionary—it was fought and refought in the very writing of history. Historians of various revolutionary sympathies wrote accounts of the Revolution as Dantonists, Robespierrists, Hébertists, and even (albeit rarely) as *enragés*. On the other side of the debate were historians who admired the Bourbons, the Girondins, and even the contemptible Directory, not to speak of Bonapartists who claimed the revolutionary mantle for their Emperor, and moderate republicans who were ecumenically inspired by the monumental events of 1789 and afterward.

Indeed, until the 1860s, when Baron Haussmann began to destroy the city's revolutionary character and its many landmarks by building broad avenues—so useful for providing a clear line of fire for artillery to rout demonstrators—the Revolution was inscribed on the city of Paris itself. The Tuileries, in whose magnificent gardens fighting had broken out in July 1789 and whose palace Louis XVI and his family had occupied after the women's march on Versailles in 1789, was still the official center of the national government. The Hôtel de Ville still stood as a testament to the revolutionary Commune, where Hébertists, *enragés*, and *sectionnaires* had debated furiously and where Robespierre had briefly taken refuge after his fall. Inasmuch as the Parisian city hall became the traditional site for the sanctification of revolutionary governments, radical insurrectionaries would repeatedly try to occupy it in the name of popular sovereignty, recapitulating its importance in the Great Revolution.

The quarters, houses, and streets that would form settings for nineteenth-century barricades—and the paving stones that would be their building material—bore testimony to Paris as the world center of revolution, but especially for the people of France. To live in Paris in the early nineteenth century was to drink at the very fountain of revolution, to feel its presence in every street, alley, cul-de-sac, and avenue. There one could encounter the sons and daughters of the *sans-culottes* who had driven forward the Great Revolution—and even elderly men and women who themselves had played a role in its events. Physically, despite Napoleon's self-celebratory monuments, Paris remained an oversize medieval city with narrow alleys, cul-de-sacs, and twisting streets, shaded by overhanging tenements as many as seven stories high—the ideal urban landscape for barricade fighters as well as for snipers. However poorly armed, civilians could defend themselves in this city with telling effect even against trained professional troops.



Paris, too, was the center of the most vigorous café life in Europe. During the Empire and the Bourbon Restoration, despite repeated attempts to suppress their political and oratorical ebullience, radical Parisians took every opportunity to express their caustic views of the current regime. Centered in the cafés where they dined, drank wine, played chess, and read periodicals, ardent young intellectuals mixed with literate artisans—although seldom with ordinary workers—to create a highly spirited public forum. As wine loosened both tongues and passions, they transported one another to visions of a France that would once again uphold the torch of an enlightened Europe against the Holy Alliance, the union of powers that Metternich of Austria, after the Napoleonic wars, had fashioned with the complicity of Prussia and Russia.

Particularly after the Bourbon Charles X was dislodged from the throne in July 1830, Paris became a fertile ground for republican and socialist clubs. Attracting especially intellectuals, these political clubs proliferated with a new vitality in the temporarily freer atmosphere of the Orléanist monarchy. Young Parisians gave avid support to Poland's efforts to emancipate herself from Russian tyranny, to Greek struggles against the grip of Turkish rule, and to Italian attempts to forge a nation out of the many territories that fractured the peninsula. Poring over the pamphlets that passed from hand to eagerly waiting hand in the radical *démimonde*, their ferment did not go unnoticed by police agents.

Broad conceptions of a socialist society were to come slowly, generally from intellectuals and journalists. Apart from Babeuf, whose Conspiracy of Equals was resurrected by Buonarroti in 1828, the earliest important socialistic visionary in France was the Comte de Saint-Simon, who, despite his title and claim to direct descent from Charlemagne, had managed to survive the full fury of the French Revolution. Saint-Simon remained throughout his life dedicated to the interests of *la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre*, as he put it—the downtrodden French working class, which was indeed the "most numerous and the poorest."

His intentions and his fantasies of a perfect harmonious society aside, Saint-Simon was the most conspicuous of the utopians to make a hardheaded assessment of the Industrial Revolution and to extol its economic promise. Welcoming advances in technology, he viewed *les industriels* as the elite of the future who would, in a world guided by reason, reorder society to alleviate the material misery of the masses. *Les industriels* included not only the workers but practical scientists, managers of industry, engineers, factory owners, and especially bankers, who Saint-Simon believed could be persuaded to channel their financial resources into socially benign enterprises. Any conflicts between these groups, he contended, were needless, the results of a socially distorted society that his utopia would remedy.

The changing emphases of Saint-Simon's ideas belongs to a history of socialist ideology rather than to the present book, as does their evolution over a



span of some thirty years into a justification for a technocratic oligarchy (Saint-Simon held no brief for democracy) and a planned economy. Here it is necessary only to note that, in certain superficial respects, he anticipated Marx's economistic views; further, he was the earliest thinker to advance the basic propositions of a state-guided socialism, which were not to be taken up and put into practice for generations. In the early 1820s Saint-Simon's disciples remained ideologically entirely within his essentially technocratic framework. But after their master's death in 1825, they set out on a course of their own, expanding his call for the moral regeneration of society and even for a "New Christianity" into the establishment of a full-fledged Saint-Simonian church, replete with rituals, hymns, costumes, a quasi-religious hierarchy, sermons, and scriptural compilations of his writings, supplemented by additions of their own. Although Saint-Simonism sank no lasting roots in the French working classes, it exercised a certain fascination on some of the industriels to whom its founder appealed—notably the banker Jacques Laffitte; the Périer brothers, financiers who founded the *Crédit Mobilier*; a number of big manufacturers; and the gifted journalist Pierre Leroux, whose Saint-Simonian journal *Le Globe* "coined" the word *socialisme* (whether independently of the British or not) in November 1832.

Of lesser importance in their day but nonetheless of considerable long-range influence, particularly among radical bohemians, were the Fourierists, whose maître, Charles Fourier, devoted most of his life to formulating a science of human nature based on "universal" laws of attraction and repulsion, and a corresponding plan for social reconstruction. A brilliant pamphleteer and a biting critic of bourgeois pretensions, Fourier remained a loner in the often arid fields of utopian socialism. His spare time—he worked as a traveling salesman—was devoted to creating extraordinarily innovative schemes for social regeneration. Wilder fantasies that he harbored, such as "anti-lions" that were to replace existing carnivores, seas to be filled with lemonade, and stages of human advancement that sometimes resembled science fiction, are easily derided. Yet Fourier, who gauged the progress of humanity by the status of women in society, drew up serious plans for self-sufficient cooperative communities, which he called phalansteries, composed of individuals whose natures would complement each other in exact mathematical ratios. Instead of boring toil, work, in Fourier's utopia, would be an enjoyable and varied activity, with an almost hourly rotation of tasks in horticultural as well as artisanal work. His originality in this respect surpassed that of socialistic theorists who followed him—indeed, many ideas that he nourished about the social organization of creative work are relevant to this day.

Fourier's utopia was by no means an egalitarian one: members of a phalanstery were to be rewarded, not on the basis of their labor or their needs, but according to the financial investment they had made in the community. In

this respect it is difficult to call Fourier a socialist. Yet he was vigorously opposed to capitalism, whose abuses he never ceased to chronicle and attack. Moreover, his phalansteries very closely resembled Owen's "villages of cooperation" (so much so that copious ink was spilled, among Owenites and Fourierists, over the tiresome issue of who had "plagiarized" from whom). Significantly, and in stark contrast to Saint-Simon, Fourier eschewed all notions of a centralized, state-managed economy, a feature of his work that endeared him to anarchists later in the century.

Although only a small number of Fourierists clustered around the lonely man in the 1820s, during the years following the Revolution of 1830 Fourier's ideas gained a respectable following among craftspeople as well as intellectuals. Like the Saint-Simonians, the Fourierists after the master's death propagated his ideas in a socialistic form. Nor did Fourierism lack for distinguished admirers in the English-speaking world. In varying degrees American journalists and authors such as Albert Brisbane, Horace Greeley, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson disseminated his ideas among their readers as well as their peers in the progressive New England elite. Some of his followers created phalansteries in the United States, of which Brook Farm, outside Boston, is the most famous.

Prior to the 1830 Revolution in France, the leading utopian socialists, including Saint-Simon and Fourier, vigorously opposed insurrections and eschewed a class analysis that focused on conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie. To be sure, they despised the exploiters of their day. Saint-Simon, for example, detested the idle and reactionary landed aristocracy that, during the Restoration, was the preeminent social class (which may account for the support he earned from financiers and manufacturers). Fourier, for his part, feared the impact of competition upon preindustrial society, and the very nature of his phalansteries reflected his disposition to favor rural life organized along communal lines. That later socialists turned their attention away from these ideas and toward the working class is due less to their utopian nature than to the great upheavals, early in the century, that occurred in France—notably the insurrections of the early 1830s and the Revolution of 1848. These events and the stirring demands of the working classes for more freedom could not be ignored, least of all because they were backed up with barricades and muskets.

To French artisans, most of whom worked in small shops and who often aspired to independent enterprises, the institutionalized trade unionism that would soon gain a stronghold among English factory workers was irrelevant. Nor did the French parliamentary tradition, in contrast to the British, open avenues for the expression of working-class discontent. As a result, French workers, like radical intellectuals, tended to view direct, even armed confrontation with an oppressive regime as the principal means for resolving



social injustices. French socialist movements, in effect, differed profoundly from their British counterparts, not only because they appeared later but because, the pacifism of early socialist theorists notwithstanding, they were much more insurrectionary.

The counterrevolutionary backlash against the French Revolution, especially under the Bourbon monarchs Louis XVIII and Charles X, also brought the repression of republican and socialist movements. Young radicals were obliged to form secret conspiratorial groups, many of which favored as their ideal a "democratic and social republic." This slogan, which was to resound through much of French revolutionary history during the century, fused radical political Jacobinism with clearly socialistic ends, pointing to a change not only in the governing regime but in the social order itself. A "democratic and social republic" would be one that provided for the poor, the underprivileged, and the helpless, and one that protected craft workers from the depredations of the privileged and powerful, and from the inroads of industrial capitalism. For many ordinary Parisians, prior to the 1830s, it was thus essentially a defensive concept, in which government would rectify gross economic inequities and protect artisans in their traditional vocations. Nonetheless, so intense was the reactionary backlash during the Restoration that even this moderate idea could be advanced only in secret conspiratorial societies.

How widespread republican conspiratorial groups were in this period, and how many were socialistic, is hard to judge, given the *démimonde* they inhabited. But the underground world clearly became a training ground for the formation of expressly insurrectionary secret societies. Although the Italian name for these societies, *carbonari*, is the more familiar one in present-day accounts, the French name, *charbonnerie* may be more appropriate because the societies probably originated in French-speaking areas of the Jura Mountains among militant charcoal burners. Their name comes from the carbon they produced, not from any use of carbine weapons. And their rituals and hierarchical structures were redolent of the Masons, albeit without any quasi-metaphysical language.

The affinity between their names notwithstanding, the two movements were of a considerably different nature in the two countries. Where the Italian *carbonari* were primarily nationalists, the French *charbonnerie* brought together red republicans, embittered Bonapartists, and socialists like Buonarroti (who actually played a major role in both the Italian and French groups). "At its height [the *charbonnerie*] had about 60,000 members in sixty departments [of France], the majority in the east," observes Pamela Pilbeam. "Its aims were vaguely subversive, stressing the brotherhood and equality of man, and it attracted young idealists as well as republicans and Bonapartists unreconciled to the new regime."<sup>9</sup> To circumvent the Restoration penal code that required any organization of more than twenty people to be officially approved, the



*charbonnerie* limited each component group, or *vente*, to twenty or fewer members. Again like the Masons, their network was structured hierarchically, culminating in a commanding *vente suprême* in Paris.

Although the *charbonnerie* had been formed by Jura workmen, the movement in Restoration France became essentially an elite phenomenon. Its red republican and other members tended to be not artisans but students, former Napoleonic officers, romantic writers and poets, and even liberals who preferred an Orleanist throne to a Bourbon one. Artisans, who constituted the great majority of French workers at the time, created their own societies based on fellowship and mutual aid, quite apart from intellectuals and professionals. Despite legislation that had been passed during the Revolution banning the traditional guild system and all kinds of trade unions, master craftsmen and journeymen established benefit and mutual aid groups to advance their own interests. Here concepts of *mutuellisme* were nourished into a specifically artisanal socialism well in advance of Proudhon's writings on mutualism in the 1840s.

The most conspicuous and rambunctious mutual benefit societies at this time were the *compagnonnages*, which were formed by journeymen artisans. *Compagnons*, or bachelor journeymen, wandered around France seeking work and gaining skills, finding temporary housing in hostels. Although their societies were formed for their mutual benefit, *compagnons*, organized according to their trades and housed together in close quarters, were imbued with a strong sense of craft exclusivity and arrogance. *Compagnons* from different trades frequently clashed with one another, often violently and riotously expressing their trade parochialism as well as their social discontents. In the cafés and streets of small towns and cities they were a perennial source of working-class divisiveness—although in times of social crisis, they might unite to fight the authorities as well. Nonetheless, as their infighting illustrates, craft distinctions still divided French workers. Indeed, it should be noted that the slogan on which the *Communist Manifesto* ended—"Workingmen of all countries, unite!"—was a plea not only for international class solidarity but also for internal class unity.

By the 1830s, however, a new mood was in the air. There was a growing feeling among workers that the term *citizen*, so commonly used as a mode of address during the Great Revolution, had a dual meaning; it meant one thing for those who worked and another for those who idly enjoyed the fruits of the workers' labor. If economists and utopian socialists still puzzled over the sources of profits and preached class conciliation, ordinary workers instinctively knew that they were being exploited, in effect robbed of their labor time. A realization was growing, ever more clearly, that Jacobinism, with its message of political freedom, was inadequate to address the needs of workers, skilled and unskilled alike. Workers in England and France were

coming to understand that freedom was incomplete if they were insecure, ill-fed, ill-housed, short-lived, and denied the simplest amenities of life. This understanding did not, in itself, render workers, least of all master artisans, receptive to sophisticated ideas of socialism, but it did open their minds to ideas of cooperative production, spelling an end to Jacobinism as the dominant ideology of social rebellion.

As the nineteenth century approached its midpoint, it was evident to the clearest minds of the time, be they communists such as Marx or astute conservatives such as Alexis de Tocqueville, that the future would be shaped by class conflicts, in which the propertyless masses would be aligned against their propertied opponents. In France, the transition from Jacobinism to socialism, while painfully slow, was to be completed in the fourth decade of the century, when the red flag was pitted in open insurrection against the tricolor of 1789.

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## NOTES

1. Sylvain Maréchal, "Manifesto of Equals" (April 1796), in *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, ed. Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 52, 55, 53; emphases in the original.
2. "Babeuf's Defense" (Vendôme, February-May 1797), in *Socialist Thought*, ed. Fried and Sanders, pp. 67-8; emphases in the original.
3. George Lichtschein, *The Origins of Socialism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 135.
4. David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817; London: Everyman, 1926), p. 52.
5. Toin Kemp, *Economic Forces in French History* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971), p. 102.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4.
7. Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (London: Edward A. Arnold, 1968), p. 114.
8. Harry W. Laidler, *History of Socialism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968), p. 97.
9. Pamela Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 21.

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## CHAPTER 23 From Restoration to Revolution

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France was to enjoy pride of place in producing the principal, indeed the legendary revolutions of the nineteenth century, virtually overshadowing uprisings elsewhere on the European continent. The French knew it—particularly the Parisians—and so did other peoples, who either loved or detested the city of the Great Revolution accordingly. Among those who loved it was Arnold Ruge, the German publicist and co-editor with the young Marx of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, who exclaimed at the outset of a journey to Paris in 1846:

We are going to France, the threshold of a new world. May it live up to our dreams! At the end of our journey we will find the vast valley of Paris, the cradle of the new Europe, the great laboratory where world history is formed and has its ever fresh source. It is in Paris that we shall live our victories and our defeats. Even our philosophy, the field where we are in advance of our time, will only be able to triumph proclaimed in Paris and impregnated with the French spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Ruge's romantic buoyancy without historical justification. If Paris never became the center of Young Hegelian philosophy that Ruge naively hoped for, it was certainly the theater for at least three revolutions within a span of forty-odd years. Its romantic aura as the revolutionary center of Europe, indeed of the world, made the city a magnet for radicals from all parts of the continent. German, Polish, Italian, and Russian exiles, among many others, mingled and established secret societies in the artisanal neighborhoods of the French capital even during the Bourbon Restoration, despite close surveillance by the French police. Following the substitution of the Orleanist Louis-Philippe for the Bourbons in 1830, the city became the mecca of revolutionary romantics who either permanently—like Chopin—or episodically—like Garibaldi—nourished themselves on the “French spirit” of conspiracy and insurrection.



Of enormous importance were the city's eastern districts on the right bank of the Seine, which were crowded with *ateliers*, a word that refers both to the workshops of craftspeople and to the studios of artists. Moreover, planted in these same districts, roughly between the Place Vendôme and the Place de la Bastille, lay the principal administrative and financial buildings of the French national government, immense royal palaces and grim bureaucratic edifices, the national bank and the bourse. In times of crisis, the very proximity of this state and capitalistic apparatus to the *ateliers* invited the discontented to seize the buildings, indeed to do nothing less than seize control of the government.

The city's romantic aura, however, was engendered by very real social tensions that prevailed within its gates. The capital was a magnet not only for revolutionaries of all nationalities but for impoverished individuals from other parts of France—for artisans who were being displaced by new technologies, and for peasants displaced by the continual parceling of family-owned land into ever smaller plots that were ever less economically sustainable. Immigrants speaking French in foreign accents increasingly intermingled with uprooted craftspeople and peasants who spoke in the heavy accents of distant provinces. In the two generations following the Great Revolution, the population of Paris soared from about 600,000 to well over a million; many of the newcomers planted no firm roots in the city's economy and lived in desolation. Wandering nomads, as they were called, from the Auvergne, in south-central France, and other provinces performed the most menial jobs, mainly as construction laborers, usually arriving in the city for work in spring and summer and returning to their villages in winter. Those who remained behind during the colder months tended to drift into the disease-ridden and criminalized slums around the Rue Saint-Denis and other eastern quarters.

The social volatility brought on by these numerous semi- and unemployed people was heightened by the archaic structure of the French economy itself. However cosmopolitan Paris seemed to foreigners, even to visitors from slum-ridden London, its working classes were highly differentiated. By far the largest number of producers, as we have seen, were artisans, such as printers, tailors, furniture makers, masons, jewelers, and carpenters. The majority were employed by masters, who worked alongside their employees in the *ateliers*. Accustomed to relatively relaxed work rhythms, they should be clearly distinguished from the proletarians who toiled in the new factories that were emerging on the outskirts of the capital.

On the next lower rung of the working class were those who worked in what we would now call sweatshops: dressmakers, lace workers, spinners, and dyers. Mainly women and children, their status was similar to that of factory workers, and like women and children in English factories, they were difficult to organize in opposition to their ruthless exploiters. At the bottom of the economic ladder were the laborers (redolent of the *bras nus* of the Great

Revolution), a multitude of transient nomads and more permanently settled workers who filled odd jobs on a daily or weekly basis. Finally, residing in their midst was a large lumpenproletariat whose lives were desperate, often criminal, as they preyed on each other and on more fortunate members of the working class. Congested in slums, they were illiterate, short-lived, overworked when not underworked, and half-starved—the victims of epidemics and food shortages. As Louis Chevalier laconically notes in his study of the Parisian lower classes, "No one [in authority] cared what the working class was doing and what was to become of it."<sup>1</sup>

Despite these strong social differentiations, the various classes of the capital were not strongly demarcated by residence or by a lack of contact with each other. To be sure, the worst slums of Paris were filled with the "dangerous classes," which might include poor and respectable workers and students, as well as nomads, thieves, and prostitutes, often packed together in extremely unhealthy rooms and apartments. But in the "better" neighborhoods individuals of markedly different social positions intermingled with one another physically, even residing in the same buildings. The first floor (or in American parlance, the second) of such a building might be rented by an affluent bourgeois family, its spacious living room adorned with chandeliers and costly furniture. The next floor up would house a more modest but still well-to-do family, while on successively higher floors lived craftspeople of limited means. Finally the small, grim, and virtually unfurnished rooms on the top floor would be occupied by the impoverished, who lived in virtual destitution. During the early years of the Restoration, the intermingling of the well-to-do with the poor seems to have been the rule rather than the exception.

Despite this physical proximity, however, social intercourse was becoming ever rarer in the 1820s and 1830s. Increasingly, the middle classes and the better-off workers were migrating to newly constructed open areas, especially in the western sectors, where dwellings were more suitable to their needs and tastes, thereby physically segregating the affluent from the poor. It was a differentiation that would culminate in later uprisings, when the western half of the city would be considered bourgeois and the eastern half working class.

## CABÉT, BLANQUI, BUCHEZ, BLANC, AND PROUDHON

To the radical members of this differentiated population, socialism, as we have seen, was coming to mean a "democratic and social republic," one in which the state would be responsible for the public welfare. But in the Napoleonic and Restoration eras, few if any of the utopian socialists, like Saint-Simon and Fourier, had a lasting influence on the artisanal workers and the industrial



proletariat, with their imaginary utopias and phalansteries. It was the concretely political ideas of socialism that gained far more influence among the working classes, addressing as they did the workers' lived concerns. Along with the writings and activities of transitional socialists like Cabet, those of Blanqui, Buchez, Blanc, and the individualistic Proudhon played varying roles in the revolutionary upheaval of 1848 and in some cases the Paris Commune of 1871, after which their influence dwindled in favor of anarchistic and Marxian ideologies.

Étienne Cabet, a transitional utopian thinker, still had one foot in Owenite and Fourierist schemes and another in down-to-earth radicalism. His utopian novel *Voyage en Icarie* (*Voyage to Icaria*), published in 1840, was based very much on Thomas More's classic *Utopia*: it advanced a state-communistic vision of production and distribution, guided by the maxim that adorned the novel's opening page: "From each according to his strength; to each according to his needs." The book, which popularized the word *communiste* nearly a decade before Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, enjoyed an immense readership when it appeared.

But the book's generous social ideas were marred by the author's preferences for uniformity in clothing, shelter, and almost every detail of daily life—a degree of standardization that anticipates dystopias rather than their opposite. The lives of Cabet's Icarians are shaped by an elite of technicians, who rule the utopia firmly. Indeed, Cabet's version of communism was so authoritarian that it gave the word a dictatorial and statist connotation that it never fully shed. Cabet himself firmly opposed insurrections; nor did his sincerity in trying to advance the interests of the working class outweigh his failings in its behalf. Yet despite the comparative harmlessness of his views, he was to be hounded out of France as a rabid *communiste*.

Among the other radicals who surfaced in France during the first half of the nineteenth century, three figures should be singled out because of their direct influence on Parisian workers and radical intellectuals: Louis-Auguste Blanqui, Louis Blanc, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Blanqui, although he had a mesmerizing effect on young romantic revolutionaries as a mysterious fomenter and dark genius of insurrectionary putsches, was less popular among workers themselves in the early years of his revolutionary activities. By contrast, Louis Blanc, the sober statesman of the Parisian working class, exercised a brief but considerable influence on the workers of 1848, in spite of his distaste for insurrection. Finally, Proudhon, a latecomer to French revolutionary politics, known to his admirers as the father of anarchism and syndicalism, exercised a considerable international influence well beyond his lifetime. Despite Proudhon's imprisonment and his flights into exile to escape persecution, he was more of a writer than an activist like Blanqui; nor was he by any means as consistent a thinker as Blanc.



Blanqui's life is so enmeshed with the history of nineteenth-century French revolutionary and working-class insurgencies that an account of one is integrally an account of both. He deservedly personifies the era of French revolutionary politics in which conspiracies persistently attempted—and failed—to violently replace capitalism with what would have been a fairly authoritarian socialist order. Born in 1805, he was a fiery product of the Great Revolution: his father, a Bonapartist official, had been a Girondin member of the Convention. A stunningly brilliant student, the young Blanqui received a classical education at the *lycée*, from which he graduated with honors, and went on to study law and medicine in Paris. Like his father, he had a passion for revolutionary politics and early in his youth joined the *charbonnerie*.

The young Blanqui was the very incarnation of the committed and unrelenting revolutionary activist. In 1827, while reporting for the liberal periodical *Le Globe*, he was wounded in popular riots. After the publication of Buonarroti's history of the Conspiracy of Equals in 1828, he gave up on a conventional journalistic career, adopting essentially Babeuvist political views. After the revolution of 1830 he helped organize several of the conspiracies that jolted the reign of Louis-Philippe, and by 1848 he had gained a widespread reputation for his intractable revolutionary activities, which sent him in and out of prison for most of his adult life. Only imprisonment prevented him from participating in the Paris Commune of 1871. Altogether Blanqui spent some thirty-one of his seventy-six years behind the bars of one jail or another.

The French bourgeoisie reacted to this dedicated man as if he were a nineteenth-century Marat. Writing of an event during the 1848 Revolution in which the National Assembly was invaded by a "mob," the aristocratic Alexis de Tocqueville gave a patently hateful description of him:

It was then that I saw appear, in his turn, in the tribune a man [Blanqui] whom I have never seen since, but the recollection of whom has always filled me with horror and disgust. He had wan, emaciated cheeks, white lips, a sickly, wicked and repulsive expression, a dirty pallor, the appearance of a mouldy frock corpse; he wore no visible linen; an old black frock coat tightly covered his lean, withered limbs; he seemed to have passed his life in a sewer, and to have just left it. I was told it was Blanqui.<sup>3</sup>

The words of the fastidious *comte* reek with class hatred and social arrogance toward a man whose health had been all but destroyed by the maltreatment of his jailers. Yet as a complete product of the French Enlightenment, Blanqui was a committed materialist, a strong believer in the power of education to change human behavior, and a bitter opponent of all forms of oppression. He regarded belief in a supernatural being as the greatest ideological impediment to the development of a revolutionary mentality and spirit. Contrary to the conventional

notion that Blanqui expected to achieve a socialist or communist society by sudden putsches, he actually thought that, while putsches and conspiracies played an important role, a long period of moral education would be necessary to abolish cupidity and material greed in favor of a communistic economy.

Like Marx, Blanqui abjured giving a detailed description of the kind of communist society he hoped would succeed the present one. "One of our most grotesque presumptions is that we barbarians, we ignoramuses, pose as legislators for future generations," he wrote in response to utopian socialists who tried to chart out the contours of a future society. Cabet's communism and Proudhonism "argue vigorously on the bank of a stream over whether there is a field of corn or wheat on the other side. Let us cross first, we will see when we get there."<sup>4</sup>

Yet Blanqui's proclivity for agitation of a practical nature often concealed a relatively insightful theory of class conflict and its role in history, including a recognition that "toilers" were a class distinct from the old Third Estate. In this respect, he was unique among the French socialists of his day. He unequivocally opposed the ownership of private property, particularly in its capitalist forms, and he vigorously despised reforms as soporifics that narcotized the desire for revolutionary change. But like many Parisian socialist writers before Marx, his economic theories were fixated not so much on industrial capital as on finance capital, which he believed drained the poor and exploited of society. For him, the source of capitalist profit lay not with the exploitation of the working class but with the ability of capitalists to overcharge buyers—a view that dovetailed closely with the prevailing socialist tendency to make moral condemnations of the profit system.

Contrary to many histories that attribute it to him, Blanqui decidedly did not invent the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat." The notion that the industrial proletariat (as yet a very small minority in France) was a hegemonic class that would lead all other "toiling" strata in transforming society was alien to his thinking. But he emphatically did believe that a temporary dictatorship by an elite of single-minded republicans—more precisely, a dictatorship of socially progressive Paris over the peasantry, which seemed to impede any social advances in France—would be needed to abolish the existing society. His Marxist and anarchist critics were not wrong when they described Blanqui as a man who envisioned the seizure of political power as the work of a small, well-educated, and highly committed conspiratorial group. The secret societies he formed in the 1830s were impressive military organizations, with command systems based on complete obedience to a secret central committee. However indirectly, they were to inspire, if not prefigure, the underground organizations established or envisioned years later by Russian populists, even anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin, and the Bolshevik leader Lenin, despite his firm opposition to Blanqui's putschist tactics.



In fairness to Blanqui, this dedicated revolutionary did not regard putsches as substitutes for popular uprisings. Nor did he seek to replace mass action with the actions of a small elite. Quite the contrary: the essential function of a Blanquist putsch was to ignite the masses into a widespread uprising against the social order. In this respect, Blanqui was actually following an image of revolution that was widely shared in France, namely, that revolutions were essentially spontaneous popular actions in which a mere spark, like the seizure of the Hôtel de Ville or the rearing of barricades in workers' districts, was all that was needed to set the oppressed in motion. Had not the Great Revolution begun as an irrepressible mass uprising initiated by Desmoulins's cry to insurrection at the Palais Bourbon in July 1789? Had not the spontaneous barricades of 1830 toppled a king? A Blanquist putsch was intended essentially as a gesture of the same kind as Desmoulins's cry, both depending for their success on the enthusiastic response of the masses. This vision of revolution as basically spontaneous was cherished by thousands of ordinary French workers and middle-class republicans up to the Paris Commune of 1871, after which it faded away in favor of organized socialist parties.

Finally, what is less known is that later in life, Blanqui wavered in his emphasis on putsches and secret conspiracies as the means for social change. In the 1870s he began to stress the importance of popular education and popular social movements based in large part on the industrial working class. But he always retained a consistent commitment to revolutionary action, and it was this commitment rather than his social theories—which he left unclear or continually modified—that finally endeared him to the masses, especially the young, who revered *le Vieux* (the "Old Man") for his unswerving dedication, honesty, and decisiveness. It is not surprising that this extraordinary and selfless man suddenly died of a stroke shortly after addressing a mass meeting on behalf of imprisoned Communards of 1871. Although he was most beloved by radical intellectuals and publicists, a vast crowd of workers accompanied his remains to their resting place in January 1881. French workers cherished him not only as a legendary symbol of the struggle for socialism but as a committed revolutionary who made no compromises with the oppression and exploitation of the masses.

Even before Blanqui's red republican views yielded to a clearly socialistic outlook, Philippe-Joseph-Benjamin Buchez, a physician and former *charbonnaire*, was propagandizing socialistic ideas of association among French workers, based on Christian principles of charity, fraternity, and equality. A populist, Buchez responded with considerable sensitivity to the plight of the workers and gave them practical help in forming associations. Known as the founder of the French cooperative movement, what made him distinctive among the theorists of the 1830s was his emphasis on working-class independence and cooperation in resistance to the encroachments of finance and industrial capitalism.

Buchez was sufficiently tame politically to write for the moderate republican periodical, *Le National*, and to be elected briefly to the presidency of the Constituent Assembly that emerged out of the 1848 Revolution. But in contrast to top-down Saint-Simonian ideas that favored economic associations controlled by entrepreneurs, he was convinced that the workers must form and control their own associations. And in contrast to his collectivist contemporaries Constantin Pecqueur and François Vidal, who envisioned the rise of large-scale industry, called for the nationalization of the economy, and relied on the state for the establishment of an associationist economy, Buchez relied on the workers themselves, to whom he turned for the financial contributions necessary to create productive associations.

Buchez's notion of association was, in many respects, radically collectivist. An association, in his view, should be established by collecting dues from workers, which would then constitute its common capital, free of any individualistic encumbrances or claims. Means of production would belong to no individual but exclusively to the association as a whole. Nor could they be restored, even in part, to an individual worker who decided to withdraw from the association. The proceeds derived from this inalienable capital would be used to purchase raw materials and machines, with which the members, working cooperatively, would produce goods for the market. The earnings would then be shared among all the association's members in an equitable and democratic manner.

Buchez's scheme was wholly oriented toward artisans and small-scale forms of production, not toward industrial proletarians and factories. His system of artisanal socialism was anachronistically counterposed to the industrial system and the advanced technology that were percolating into France. But perhaps Buchez's most important heir was Louis Blanc, whose place in the history of socialism greatly eclipsed his and who figured very significantly in the 1848 Revolution.

Characterized in his own day as a utopian socialist, Blanc's political behavior was that of a prudent parliamentarian with generous but moderate social ideals. Like Blanqui, Blanc was the son of a French Bonapartist official; he was born in Madrid in 1811 and educated in Corsica. In 1837, having made his way to Paris, he founded a radical democratic periodical, *La Revue du progrès*, and during the 1830s and early 1840s he acquired a measure of scholarly distinction for his historical works, particularly his account of the French Revolution, in which he was partial to the Jacobin republic. But Blanc was no insurrectionary. He opposed the uprising of the Parisian workers in June 1848 and the Commune of 1871, and in 1872 he even supported legislation against the International Workingmen's Association, or First International. By the time of his death in 1882, he had become so domesticated politically that the Chamber of Deputies, of which he was a member, voted to give him a state funeral.



What initially won Blanc wide acclaim among the working class was his book *Organisation du travail* (The Organization of Work), initially published as a series in his *Revue* in 1840, in which he elaborated his scheme of *ateliers sociaux*, or social workshops as a cooperative alternative to a capitalist economy. In the final form in which Blanc envisioned them, these workshops would be governed by the workers themselves and would be federated into large worker-controlled productive associations.

But initially, Blanc's social workshops were to be aided by benevolent banks and a sympathetic state, which would provide the credit needed to subsidize them. Insofar as this scheme depended at first upon state subsidies, it has been regarded as an early form of state socialism. By cooperating with each other and fostering a high level of morale, the *ateliers* would ultimately be able to gain a stronger competitive edge over capitalist enterprises. Gradually, Blanc hoped, capitalist firms would find it more profitable to merge with the more efficient social workshops, for which they would receive a suitable profit and the assurance of a more stable society. Class conflict, in effect, would be abolished by the sheer play of market forces.

The competitive success Blanc envisioned for his *ateliers* should not be taken as an indication that he thought highly of either competition or the market. Quite to the contrary, his horror at the effects of the *laissez-faire* economy's impact on the English proletariat made him into a communist, although he carefully eschewed this word in favor of socialist. Nevertheless, he was clearly guided by communist principles of production and distribution. Natural inequalities, he believed, existed among individuals, but these inequalities must be compensated for in a free and humane society.

All men are not equal in physical force, in intelligence; all have not the same tastes, the same inclinations, the same aptitudes, any more than they have the same visage or the same figure; . . . but each one should be placed in a condition to derive the greatest possible advantage from his faculties, in so far as this can be done with due regard to others, and to satisfy as completely as possible, without injuring others, the needs which nature has given him.<sup>5</sup>

The moral improvement of humanity, Blanc believed, would spawn an entirely new set of values that would recognize the need to compensate individuals for these inequalities. He was voicing, in effect, a communistic critique of the liberal assumption (previously held by Jacobins) that freedom exists when everyone, irrespective of capacity, is equal before the law and is compensated by society according to the work they have performed. Blanc, on the contrary, argued that under this system, some would suffer privation regardless of their performance, because they would be beset by greater material requirements. Instead, he

maintained, an individual's remuneration should depend upon his or her needs and those of their families, irrespective of their labor and skills.

Like Cabot before him and like Marx after him, Blanc rejected the contractarian notion of compensation according to the amount of work people performed—or what Marx would later call “bourgeois right”—and replaced it with the notion of compensation according to the needs that they had to satisfy. Or as Blanc was among the first to put it: “From every man according to his faculties” (which Blanc designated as “duty”) and “To every man—within the limits of the resources of the community—according to his wants” (which he called “right”).<sup>4</sup> This principle by far outweighs in importance Blanc's naïve prescriptions for class collaboration and renders his name highly significant in the history of socialist ideas. For Blanc had stated more clearly than any theorist of his day the basic maxim of a communist society: “From each according to ability, to each according to need.”

But given his reliance on the state for initial financing and for technical and managerial expertise for his *ateliers*, was Blanc committed to permanent state control over society? Surprisingly, he was not: he never intended that his social workshops would be nationalized or placed in the hands of a bureaucracy. Quite to the contrary, he was one of the earliest French socialists to advocate workers' control of production. An earnest advocate of voluntary association, he fervently believed that social workshops would be impossible unless the workers were strongly committed to socialist ideas and unless all the workshops were equally committed to acting cooperatively in their common interest—ethically as well as materially—to produce a cooperative society. As such, his views more closely resemble those of syndicalism, which places a high premium on libertarian networks of worker-controlled enterprises. His plan for *ateliers sociaux*, more than any socialist ideas advanced in the 1840s, approximated the most socialistic goals that could have been achieved by the artisanal society of his day, and in later decades, in continental Europe as a whole, they indirectly influenced many confederal and decentralistic notions of a socialist economy.

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<sup>4</sup> Louis Blanc, 1848, *Historical Revelations: Inscribed to Lord Normanby* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), p. 109. This virtually forgotten account of the 1848 Revolution contains one of the ablest expositions of “wants” written by any communist and warrants careful rereading. The rather sophomoric criticism of communism is sometimes made that individuals who are free to take as much as they want might very well exhaust the common pool and render a communist society impossible; a coercive authority, such as a state bureaucracy, would therefore be necessary to allocate available goods. Blanc's qualification that “wants” or “needs” would be circumscribed by the “resources of the community” answers this claim. It would obviously be the responsibility of the community to decide, in a rational and democratic manner, what was available.



By contrast, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who himself has been credited with fostering syndicalist ideas under the name of "mutualism," seems to have taken a remarkably jaundiced view of the "principle of association."<sup>6</sup> Like Fourier nearly forty years earlier, Proudhon was born in Besançon, in his case to parents of a working-class and peasant background. Unlike Fourier, however, he seems to have been incapable of transcending the provincialism and parochialism of small-town France. A firm paterfamilias (indeed, a misogynist), Proudhon mystified the peasant family as the basic unit of social life, and like many French peasants, whose notion of exploitation seldom extended beyond the necessity of paying interest to moneylenders, he thought of economic ills as caused primarily by finance capital—particularly by Jewish lenders. In fact, long after his death, his bitter anti-Semitism, combined with his patriarchal outlook, were to make many of his views congenial to European reactionaries, including outright fascists.

These limitations did not prevent Proudhon from acquiring the lofty title of the "father of anarchism." His avowed hostility toward government and politics, however, was by no means unique; it was very much in harmony with a rural mentality that resented tax collectors and notaries as oppressors. Nor was his attitude toward the state consistently negative. Despite his frequent denunciations of state power and authority in general, he often softened his attitude with changing circumstances and even whims. Nevertheless, his defiant rejection of many economic and political shibboleths of the day gave him notoriety as a provocative contrarian, an image that he carefully cultivated, despite his numerous ideological self-contradictions and pedestrian views.

Proudhon, in fact, was not quite the *enfant terrible* he made himself out to be. It is true that he holds a place in the trajectory of French socialism—if socialist he was—by virtue of his commitment to a labor theory of value. By calling for exchange based on the amount of labor that was required to manufacture the products involved, his ideas potentially gave an important centrality to the proletariat, although he was strongly focused on artisans and their concerns. Despite his famous cry, "Property is theft!" however, Proudhon was no socialist: he definitely favored private property, advancing an economy structured around small privately owned enterprises that would be linked together by contracts untainted either by profit considerations or by exploitation.

By making a distinction between "property" acquired by exploitation and "possession" acquired by labor, Proudhon essentially smuggled into his vision a belief in private property, albeit with a moral aura. His statement "property is theft" did not refer strictly to tangible economic property, nor was it intended to lead to the abolition of private property. Rather, in Proudhon's thinking, property was a vague moral category—and had it been generally understood for what it was by his capitalist critics in 1840, when *What Is Property?* was



published, Proudhon would not have been considered "the terror of the French bourgeoisie," as George Lichtheim sardonically observes.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Proudhon was a committed individualist and proprietor who expressly denounced "the principle of association" because it "necessarily implies obligation, common responsibility, fusion of rights and duties in relation to outsiders." As such, he argued, it inhibits the allegedly "stimulating" effects of competition in advancing technological development. In fact, in order to denounce association, Proudhon invoked nearly every philistine argument that could be drawn from the bourgeois repertory, including the canard that association rewards "the weak and lazy associate." Association requires, much to his outrage, that "all are responsible for all: the smallest is as great as the greatest: the last comer has the same rights as the oldest member."<sup>8</sup> As for communism, he considered it authoritarian in all its forms, presumably because of Cabot's statism and Blanc's associationism.

Proudhon consistently condemned the communist principle of distribution according to needs rather than ability "as unproductive and harassing, applicable to quite special conditions, its inconveniences growing much more rapidly than its benefits, ... equally opposed to the advantageous use of labor and to the liberty of the workman."<sup>9</sup> The worker's salvation, he argued, lies in "competition which gives [skill and talent] life."<sup>10</sup> One may reasonably wonder why Proudhon felt it necessary to promote this viewpoint among French workers when bourgeois economists everywhere were also hailing competition as humanity's salvation. Nor is it quite clear that workers, rather than the Parisian bourgeoisie, made Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (from which the foregoing passages are taken) a publishing success upon its appearance in July 1851.

The "reciprocity" that Proudhon favored seems to have been nothing more than the solid bourgeois principle of equivalence: each person should receive exactly what is his or her due, exclusively on the basis of an "equal" exchange of commodities. His anarchism, if such it can be called, rewarded hard, virtuous toil but made no social allowance for the care of the weak, infirm, aged, or even physically impaired who were unable to perform such toil. These unequal individuals would be left to the ministrations of charity or, more likely, to care by the family, the basic unit of Proudhonist social life. There is nothing in Proudhon's image of the good society that obliges a collective concern for their fate. The systemic "equalization" of inequalities in ability among real people under a communist system seems, if anything, to have affronted Proudhon, since it violated his sacred precept of the exchange of equivalences.

The sinew of Proudhon's social vision was his commitment to contract not, let it be emphasized, a Rousseauian "social contract" but the mundane everyday contracts that uphold the capitalist economy. Only one moral provision distinguished the Proudhonist contract from the capitalist contract: it

absured profit and exploitation. In Proudhon's anarchist society, free and completely autonomous individuals, indeed property owners, would contract to exchange of goods and services with one another, taking exactly their due—no more and no less—in terms of the value of labor involved in producing the goods exchanged. Nor was contract, for Proudhon, merely an economic instrument for assuring fair trade—rather, it was the mainstay of industrial labor as well. Workers within factories would contract with one another to exchange their labor, and factories would contract with one another to form federations, as would communities, all on the basis of the equal exchange of goods and services. The notion of associating on an ethical basis seems to have eluded Proudhon's social vision. At the core of his "mutualism" lay not a moral concept but a plan to finance these enterprises by means of a People's Bank, or Bank of Exchange, which would afford small proprietors low-interest loans drawn from the savings and investments of ordinary workers.

Obviously, Proudhon's proprietarian views, based above all on the patriarchal family and individual possession, brought him into opposition to communism in all its forms. What made him seem socialistic was his hectoring rhetoric, his slogans formulated more for their shock value than for their substance, and his moral injunctions against the exploitation of labor and the pursuit of profit. But his strong emphasis on individual ownership, self-interest, contractual market relationships, and distribution based on ability rather than need—and his implacable hostility to associationism and communism—all were surprisingly indistinguishable from the conventional bourgeois wisdom of his day.

Nor were his acolytes by any means the most radical in France, rarely designating themselves as anarchists but preferring the milder and more socially acceptable term mutualists. Where Proudhon opposed strikes and insurrections as too coercive, his closest adherents were only too eager to follow in their maître's path. Bakunin, who regarded Proudhon as a pioneering theorist of anarchism, was nonetheless sharply critical of "Proudhonist individualists." Some Proudhonists, like his own heir apparent, Henri Tolain, were actually very conservative in their social views. Tolain, a true contractarian, not only opposed civil rights for women but sat in the very Chamber of Deputies that presided over the suppression of the Paris Commune of 1871, for which he was understandably reviled by French workers, many of them his former admirers.

Given Proudhon's gradualist approach to social change and his opposition to militant actions of almost any sort, his ideas required major surgery before they could be accepted by neo-Proudhonist supporters of the Paris Commune of 1871. What Proudhonist Communards absorbed from his work was his emphasis on federalism as the basic structure of social life, rather than his strident individualism. Indeed, the dwindling number of Proudhonists who helped establish the syndicalist movement in France during the closing decades



of the nineteenth century, based on the general or mass strike, would have shocked their maître, had he not died six years before the Commune. The fact is that Proudhon's connection with syndicalism rests on an artificially generated myth. As Bernard H. Moss notes,

During the height of revolutionary syndicalism, a circle of French intellectuals, in opposition to Germanic Marxism, sought to define the French socialist tradition as Proudhonian. While they found no historical filiation between Proudhonism and syndicalism, they established the myth of a Proudhonian labor movement, shared by liberal and Marxist historians alike, which has never been confirmed by historical investigation. In only one period, the early 1860s, did Proudhonism have a definite impact upon labor militants, but this was in the early stages of a movement that soon violated its precepts in theory and practice. The goal of trade socialism, the collective ownership of industry by trade federations, was incompatible with Proudhon's anarchism of small independent producers. If one is to attach trade socialism to the anarchist tradition, then it is surely closer to the "collectivist" anarchism of Bakunin than to the individualistic anarchism of Proudhon.<sup>11</sup>

Although syndicalists were to borrow certain key ideas from Proudhon, as we shall see, libertarian working-class movements, especially in Spain, were obliged to shed Proudhon's essential gradualism and proprietarianism. His notion of a low-interest People's Bank, which he tried in vain to establish, was all but dropped from the theoretical armamentarium of anarchism and syndicalism (see Chapter 32). Later anarchists were obliged to turn to figures like Bakunin and Kropotkin for inspiration, both of whose outlooks were not only collectivistic and communistic but decidedly revolutionary.

By the 1850s, Proudhon's influence on French workers had declined to a near vanishing point; his opposition to strikes, his on-off support of Louis Bonaparte, and other such retreats from his seemingly militant stance left him, after his death in 1865, with a dwindling following. Only because anarchists, by sorting out ideas that he had left vague or contradictory, turned him into one of their saints did his work manage to gain posthumous fame. A number of his ideas affected the thinking of Tolstoy, Martin Buber, and Gandhi—as well as corporatist tendencies on the right that were to feed into the fascism of Mussolini and of Vichy France. In more recent times he has been revived by anarchists drifting toward "market socialism," a phrase that may reasonably be considered a contradiction in terms.

It was not until well after the Revolution of 1830, when a self-conscious workers' movement appeared, that Blanqui, Cabet, Buchez, Blanc, and Proudhon were to become voices, to one degree or another, of a class-oriented social movement. Although both Cabet and Blanqui were participants in local

upheavals during the Restoration, Blanc and Proudhon were much too young to have become involved in the early revolutionary movements of the period. Nor did any of them exercise influence among actual French working people, be they artisans or industrial proletarians, in the 1820s. In fact, what mainly concerned French workers at the end of the decade was economic difficulties and the increasingly repressive behavior of Charles X.

## THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

The fragility of the Bourbon Restoration is perhaps most dramatically revealed by the ease with which Napoleon Bonaparte, on his sudden return from exile in Elba, temporarily deposed Louis XVIII in the famous one hundred days of the emperor's rule in 1815. Only the exhaustion of France after Waterloo—the last battle in the seemingly interminable wars associated with Bonaparte's name—gave the Bourbon monarchy any staying power in the country.

France wanted peace—peace from imperial conflicts, as well as peace from revolution. The Congress of Vienna that followed Napoleon's defeat—a concert of Europe's principal powers—left no doubt that any renewal of revolution or warfare on the part of the French would meet with swift repression and a stern occupation. A Holy Alliance among Prussia, Russia, and Austria, fashioned by Alexander I of Russia and Metternich of Austria, was established to forestall any Bonapartist ambitions and, more significantly, to prevent France from once again initiating a revolutionary wave across the European continent.

Yet nothing was farther from the minds of the French people than revolution. Neither the peasantry, who were major recipients of the Revolution's and Bonaparte's agrarian policies, nor the bourgeoisie—and least of all the great financiers, its most powerful stratum—wanted a continuation of war and social instability. The rest of French society, in turn, had been drained by taxes and demands for military service. Despite certain technological advances, industry had gained very little from the Napoleonic wars. On the contrary, the British blockade had appreciably reduced France's international markets and domestic standard of living, setting back the country's economic development for all strata of the population.

Thus Louis XVIII's nine-year reign, from 1815 to 1824, was one of economic retrenchment and peace at any cost. Fat and clumsy, the brother of Louis XVI must have known he was not loved, not even by the contemptuous and arrogant émigrés whom he eventually remunerated for the loss of their estates during the Great Revolution and who, together with an accommodating nobility that had arisen under Napoleon, formed the predominant land-owning



ruling class during the Restoration. The country, in short, needed to catch its breath and recover a measure of normality, which a stable monarchy seemed able to provide. The king, in turn, was shrewd enough to realize that, while his status was shaky, the monarchy was desirable, and the better part of wisdom was to govern his country with fairly loose reins.

The economic changes produced by the Revolution, he realized, could not be undone. Although he remunerated the émigrés, the peasants and land speculators would never give up the holdings they had gained. Nor would the bourgeoisie allow the juridical rights it had acquired since 1789 to be completely effaced. Yet the very republic that had initiated the new agrarian dispensation and the new individual rights was hardly spoken of in polite company. Clerics and secular educators saw to it that republicanism was identified with terror, civil war, social instability, material deprivation, and foreign conflict. Even in the 1820s there were young men who knew nothing whatever about the Girondins and Jacobins, including many whose fathers had been among their strongest adherents.

But the old nobility was not to be stilled. The first year of Louis's reign saw the emergence of bitter fury on the part of the aristocracy, which sought redress for its smoldering grievances and reprisals against the revolutionaries who had driven them from France a generation earlier. In July 1815 the ostensibly "free" elections to the Chamber of Deputies, based on a scandalously restricted electorate, brought a vindictive royalist majority (or "ultras," as they were called) of 350 legislators out of 420 to power. A "white terror" ensued that placed stringent restrictions on the press and removed innumerable Bonapartists from the bureaucracy and other public offices. Thousands of highly qualified officials—from the municipal level, through the departmental, to the highest national offices—were sent into a counterrevolutionary limbo, where they were left to seethe in fury against their old opponents. Special military tribunals were established throughout the country that delivered not only prison but death sentences. Even Marshall Ney, Napoleon's most popular commander, who had received a peerage from Louis XVIII but defected to the emperor during the "hundred days," was executed after a trial in the Chamber of Peers.

Louis XVIII, however, was still committed to making compromises with social changes that he knew could not be undone without plunging the country into civil war. Even before Napoleon's "hundred days," Louis had adopted the Charter of 1814, or *Charte*, which allowed for a carefully selected hereditary Chamber of Peers, an elected Chamber of Deputies, and guarantees of equality before the law and freedoms of expression, conscience, and worship, as well as the inviolability of citizens from arbitrary arrest and seizure of property. The Napoleonic Code, which had rationalized the country's legal system, was kept intact, and gifted men like Talleyrand, who had served not only the early

revolutionary government but the Directory and Bonaparte, retained important offices. Louis, in fact, took umbrage at his Chamber of Deputies, whose ultraroyalist convictions were so extreme that, in pursuing monarchical absolutism, it gathered parliamentary power for itself at the expense of the throne's authority, not unlike the notables who tried to weaken Louis XVI's power in 1789.

Finally, little more than a year after the Chamber of Deputies of 1815 was installed, Louis had had enough of its proscriptive legislation, and he dissolved the *Chambre introuvable* ("Incomparable Chamber," as it was maliciously called). The elections that followed returned a majority of moderate royalists who, under various ministries, remained in power until 1821, providing France with a period of relative prosperity and stability.

This quiet period also allowed for a political regroupment in the Chamber of Deputies, yielding a "Left" composed of reconstructed republicans such as the aging Marquis de Lafayette, as well as moderate constitutional monarchists such as Benjamin Constant, Hippolyte Carnot (whose father had been an outstanding general during the Revolution and a member of the Directory), and other men who were loathed by the ultraroyalist minority in the Chamber. This quasi-factional "Left" worked in conjunction with the larger group of moderate parliamentarians, or "Independents," in the Chamber, including wealthy bourgeois elements such as the banker Jacques Laffitte, the cotton and sugar baron Benjamin Delessert, the merchant Ternaux, and the entrepreneur Casimir Périer.

The moderate or liberal governments of these years provided the country with sufficient economic prosperity to keep the bourgeoisie and the working class fairly quiescent. Although the wrangling between the liberal coalition and the ultraroyalists in the Chamber of Deputies continued, it was not serious enough to be of major concern to the lower classes. France was still ruled by landowners. The nobility and its minions exercised their most effective power through the prefects and subprefects who administered the departments, the provincial judges, and the municipal hirelings who genuflected before their agrarian masters. Craftsmen and peasants, living in their own self-enclosed world, were indifferent to a national regime over which they had no influence whatever. The electoral base for the Chamber of Deputies was brazenly limited to well-to-do individuals who paid a minimum of 300 francs in taxes—which meant that only 110,000 out of a population of about nine million adults had the right to vote.

But this basically stable situation came to an end in 1820, when the Duke of Berry, the king's nephew, was assassinated, unleashing a furious royalist backlash. Louis, who was also outraged, restricted the franchise even further by establishing the so-called "double vote," according to which the wealthiest quarter of the electorate—about 25,000 men—were given the



exclusive right to select 165 deputies out of the 265 chosen by the "general" electorate for the Chamber. (In the elections of 1823 the ultras were to gain a huge legislative majority—not only by means of the new franchise restrictions, but because local notables, state-appointed prefects of the departments, and local ultra thugs engaged in crass manipulation and fraud to assure their victory. They did not hesitate to use the names of dead royalists to pack the electoral lists in support of their candidates. That the elections were blatantly rigged was a widely known fact to which the government turned a blind eye.)

In 1821 Louis XVIII replaced the moderate ministry of Eli Decazes with one presided over by the extremely reactionary Count of Villèle, the leader of the ultraroyalists in the Chamber of Deputies. As president of the king's council, Villèle floated a state loan to further recompense émigrés and others who had lost their lands during the Republic—a gesture that many peasants and bourgeois who had purchased *biens nationaux* in the 1790s feared might lead to a wholesale restoration of the old noble estates. His ministry stroked the Catholic Church by making obeisances to its authority, giving it emoluments and an enhanced status as "the religion of Frenchmen." Above all, it increased clerical control over education, which created widespread uneasiness among many secular citizens, especially those who had benefited from the sale of Church lands during the Revolution. Restrictions, including unbridled acts of censorship, were placed on the liberal press; the term of service for members of the Chamber of Deputies was extended from four to seven years; and to the fury of liberals who still claimed some filiations with the cause of freedom, French troops were used in support of the Spanish monarchy against Spanish revolutionaries during the peninsular uprising of 1823. His ministry spanning Louis's and Charles X's reigns, Villèle personified the new *Chambre retrouvée*, much to the approval of the reactionary ultras.

Under Villèle, the Right could also settle its scores with its liberal opponents by making use of loopholes in the *Charte* of 1814 that favored the king. Although nearly all deputies avowed their allegiance to the document, its preamble averred that the monarch had granted it "voluntarily" to France, "by the free exercise of our royal authority." This phrase coupled the *Charte* to the will of the monarch, who theoretically could rescind it just as freely as he had granted it. Additionally, the *Charte* averred that the government ministers were "responsible," but to whom—the king or the Chamber of Deputies?—it did not specify. Thus ministerial responsibility seemed to float freely in the air, at the discretion of the king, as the ultras claimed, or the Chamber of Deputies, as the opposition claimed. Finally, the *Charte* contained a stipulation, Article 14, that gave the king the authority to dispatch the entire constitutional system at will, should he choose:

The king is the supreme head of the state. He commands the land and sea forces, declares war, makes treaties of peace, alliance, and commerce, appoints all public officials, and makes all regulations and ordinances for the execution of the laws, and the security of the state.<sup>12</sup>

Under Louis, all of these royalist formulations had been regarded as mere rhetoric that asserted France's monarchical status. But Article 14 was waiting in the wings, at the disposal of any authoritarian monarch who might choose to exercise it. And it was precisely such a monarch, Charles X, aided by an entourage of unforgiving ultras, who took control of the French throne upon the death of Louis in 1824.

If Louis likely knew he was not beloved, Charles at least should have suspected that most of the French people thoroughly detested him. Only the most fanatical ultras of the émigré population and their offspring—those who abominated the Revolution and republicanism in any form—rallied around the new king, feeding his worst fears of revolutionary conspiracies. Ascending the throne at the age of sixty-seven, Charles had been an émigré for twenty-five years as the Count of Artois. Having left France as early as 1789, he subsequently plotted with Bourbon loyalists abroad against the Republic, the Directory, and the Empire. In 1824, once Charles became king, he and Villèle matched each other like a royal hand and a perfectly fitting ministerial glove.

But even within the limited and wealthy electorate on which Villèle based his authority, a major split soon appeared. Many voters felt that the president of the king's council was spinning too far to the right, while the zealous ultras in the legislature felt that he was not going far enough. By 1827 Villèle had alienated his ultra supporters as much as his liberal opponents in the Chamber, making it difficult, if not impossible, for his ministry to govern the country effectively. Although it is difficult to see how he could have hoped to realign French political life in his favor, he was obliged to urge Charles to call new elections.

The liberals, in turn, had learned only too well that they had to organize at a grassroots level to prevent more outrageous electoral malfeasances from the right. In 1827 lawyers, journalists, and the editors of the liberal periodical *Le Globe* created a public supervisory and educational group with the name *Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera* ("God helps those who help themselves," or more loosely, "self-help"), to disencumber the forthcoming elections of manipulation by notables and royal prefects. A large network of *Aide-toi* committees was established all over France to oversee the electoral lists, obstruct ultra interference in voting assemblies, and propagandize voters in support of liberal candidates. Their highly effective activities successfully augmented the number of liberal voters who participated in the elections of November 1827, reducing the ultras in the Chamber to a small bloc of 60 to 80, as against 180 liberals. Villèle resigned and was replaced by a the liberal Viscount of Martignac



(albeit officially as the minister of interior rather than as president of the council, leaving the king free to run the ministry as he chose).

The liberal victory in 1828 had causes that went far beyond ultra political intransigence alone. Since 1827 and even since 1825 in the north, France had been sinking into a deep-seated economic crisis. Especially in the north, bad harvests, particularly of grain and of potatoes, deprived industrial workers and the poor of staple foods. These shortages, combined with a major financial crisis and unemployment (partly due to imports of cheap British iron), deepened the popular hatred of Villèle and Martignac and stoked widespread riots and denunciations of the regime—in some cases of the king. Textile workers in Normandy and Alsace were either thrown out of work owing to foreign imports or suffered cuts in their already low wages. These economic afflictions induced further rioting, and many city workers, having lost their jobs, were obliged to return to the villages from which they had drifted in economically more halcyon days. Although the workers most deeply affected by the economic crisis had no stake in the political world that denied them the vote, their actions unnerved all the middle and upper classes of the country, inspiring fears of a new social upsurge by the lower classes.

And for good reason: the 1820s had seen a revival of strong public interest in the Great Revolution. Memoirs by participants had begun to appear, and even Adolphe Thiers, a gifted journalist for the liberal press, published his *Histoire de la révolution française* between 1823 and 1827, which dealt sympathetically with the Convention, even trying to account for the Terror objectively, despite the author's predilection for constitutional monarchy. Literate young people for whom the Revolution had been shrouded in mystery could now become acquainted with the events of 1789 to 1794, and they did so with genuine zest.

The death of Napoleon in his St. Helena exile in 1821, moreover, rendered the emperor a safe subject for public adulation as well, adding to the fascination with France's revolutionary past. A flood of memoirs by Bonapartists were published, and memorabilia from the era before Waterloo, generally in the form of insignias, songs, and busts of the emperor, became popular consumer items. Napoleon, reviled by the Bourbon monarchy as a "monster," now became a popular hero, initiating the Napoleonic legend that was to haunt France for generations. The government was continually on the watch for republican and Bonapartist conspiracies, whose importance Villèle cynically exaggerated to retain his hold on his royalist constituency. In reality, the danger from republicans and Bonapartists was negligible during the Villèle and Martignac ministries, but as the 1820s drew to their end, exaggerations of their danger added to a growing public sense of social crisis.

In fact, it was Charles himself who was the immediate source of the crisis. The king, ever mindful of 1789, viewed the growing militancy of the liberal press and liberal organizations as evidence of a looming revolution. Despite his

avowal of adherence to the *Charte*, the king at heart was a devout supporter of the traditional institutions and values of the ancien régime: the quasi-feudal nobility, the moral authority of the Catholic Church, and the absolute supremacy of the monarch over all other institutions of the realm. Almost blind to the social changes in France since the Great Revolution, he retained an unswerving commitment to the very views that had sent his brother Louis XVI to the scaffold several decades earlier.

Perhaps no king was less suited to occupy the French throne than Charles, whose social vision extended no further than that of his guillotined brother. His unreconstructed worldview stood in flat opposition to the discontent of the liberals, who felt in varying degrees that France had yet to catch up with Britain as a constitutional monarchy. If the French king regarded liberal views as political heresy, indeed outright treason, the liberals and their various supporters, even moderate royalists, regarded the king as a political retrograde, with a chilling incapacity to stabilize the country, still less to rule it.

In 1829, when the minister, Martignac, attempted to allay liberal hostility to the crown by abolishing press censorship and curbing Jesuit control of education, the king replaced him with Jules Armand, the prince of Polignac—a reactionary so extreme and a Catholic so devout that he flatly refused to take the constitutional oath to obey the *Charte*. The Polignac ministry and the Chamber of Deputies were now on a direct collision course. Even a bloc of royalists led by François-René de Chateaubriand, a prominent romantic writer of the day, angrily defected from the ultra camp, leaving the king with a hostile majority against the ministry. The liberal press, in turn, particularly *Le National*, raised a howl against the new regime, comparing Charles with James II of England, the monarch whose harsh reactionism had induced the English ruling classes to unseat him in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688.

Nor was the comparison between the late Stuarts and the late Bourbons unwarranted. In England, after Cromwell's Protectorate, the compliant Charles II had been succeeded by his brother James II, whose absolutism led to the definitive end of the Stuart kings. In France Louis XVIII, who had seemed willing to compromise, was succeeded by the unbending reactionary Charles X. A replay of 1789 now appeared to be in the offing. When a shuffling of cabinet positions and some feeble attempts by Charles to limit the Chamber of Deputies' legislative agenda to safe budgetary issues failed to quell the discontent, it became clear that the king would have to resort to his Article 14 powers and take dictatorial control of the state to annul the legislative powers of the Chamber.

In a threatening address on March 2 to a packed meeting of the legislature in the Louvre, the king significantly denounced "criminal maneuvers" against the government and issued warnings that he would "maintain public order." To this announcement the Chamber defiantly drafted a sharp reply. "The



permanent accord" between the wishes of the people and the government, the liberal deputies decided to say to the king, "does not now exist," and the people viewed his regime as "a threat to their liberties."<sup>12</sup> After two days of secret discussion by the Chamber over the reply, 221 deputies voted to support the reply, and 181 voted against.

The die was now cast between the king and the Chamber. Further negotiations, in which the king averred that his "resolves are unalterable," ended in predictable collapse, after which, on March 19, Charles dissolved the legislature, amid furious liberal cries of "Vive la Charte!" and exultant royalist cries of "Vive le roi!" The constitution was now unmistakably pitted against the arbitrary authority of an absolutist monarch.

Although the king had dismissed the Chamber of Deputies, the July 1830 election returned a new Chamber with a greatly increased liberal opposition, from 221 to 274—reflecting 201 of the 221 defiant deputies from the previous legislature—as against a mere 145 for the king's ministry. To deepen the crisis, on July 25 the monarch and his supporting council issued five ordinances, four of which amounted to a *de facto* cancellation of the Charte's provisions for limited constitutional government. One ordinance annulled the new election by dissolving the new Chamber even before it had an opportunity to convene, while another reduced the electorate for deputies to include only the wealthiest, generally landed men of the realm, disenfranchising most businessmen, lawyers, and professionals. Still another ordinance required editors and printers to acquire preliminary authorization before publishing any periodical, subject to review every three months, essentially suspending freedom of the press.

To the liberals and many moderate royalists, as well as the politically aware public, the ordinances—essentially monarchical decrees—amounted to nothing less than a reactionary coup d'état that effectively nullified the Charte of 1814. By turning back the clock to the days of Louis XVI, the five ordinances, so peremptorily issued by Charles, opened the door to revolution.

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## NOTES

1. Arnold Ruge, *Zwei Jahre in Paris* (Leipzig, 1846), quoted in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 62.

2. Louis Chevalier, *Working Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Frank Jellinek (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 189.

3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 163.

4. Louis-Auguste Blanqui, *Critique sociale* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1885), quoted in Alan B. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 105 and 108.

5. Louis Blanc, *Organisation du travail*, quoted in Harry W. Laidler, *History of Socialism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968), p. 63. Marx gave a very similar discussion in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

6. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851), trans. John Beverly Robinson (London: Pluto Press, 1989), pp. 78-80. The word *mutualist* was minted by the silk weavers of Lyons, who waged two great insurrections in the early 1830s, long before Proudhon came to prominence. They used the term to denote a kind of guild communalism that emerged from their own experience, rather than from the ideas of Proudhon or any other thinker.

7. George Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 90.

8. Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution*, pp. 83-4.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

11. Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 6-7. Among the "circle of French intellectuals" who gave Proudhonism this syndicalist spin, Moss cites Jules L. Putech, Gaston Pissou, and Maxime Leroy.

12. Quoted in David H. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 11n.

13. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 20.



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## CHAPTER 24 The Revolution of 1830

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None of the leading liberals, still less the ultras, had any suspicion that Charles's coup d'état would induce Paris to explode in revolution. Nor did the opposition factions in the Chamber of Deputies have any desire to see the return of armed masses—so redolent of the *journées* of the Great Revolution—with their capacity for violence against the well-to-do and against property. In 1830, bourgeois and nobles were still alive who could vividly recall the great masses of *sans-culottes* who had stormed the Bastille, battled the king's troops in the Luxembourg Garden, and roared approvingly at the drop of the guillotine's blade. Yet despite rumors that the king might use his Article 14 powers to act sternly against the new, more liberal Chamber of Deputies, the full scope of his repressive plans was virtually unknown to anyone outside the circle of his closest ministers. The new ordinances had been composed in such complete secrecy that Polignac kept the sole copy of them on his own person, even refusing to place them in a locked drawer in his desk.

Nor did Charles need to be convinced by any of his ministers that he had to act forcefully against the opposition in the Chamber. According to one recollection, the king, who soon left for his summer residence at Saint-Cloud, firmly declared on signing the ordinances: "The more I think about it the more I am convinced that it is impossible to do otherwise."<sup>1</sup>

### "THREE GLORIOUS DAYS"

But if the king was resolute, his liberal opponents were not. For them, the official publication of the ordinances—in the *Moniteur* on July 26—arrived like a thunderclap, sending them scurrying around, disoriented, to the homes and editorial offices of their allies. Even the commander of the Parisian Gendarmerie was taken completely by surprise; no one in the ministry had seen fit to inform

him that his police forces might soon be needed to curb public violence. Many liberals and royalists in their country homes learned about the king's coup d'état from visitors streaming in panic from the capital. The public that did not subscribe to the *Moniteur* heard the news in reading rooms and cafés. The leading and lesser lights of the Parisian business, journalistic, and political communities nervously gathered—in small numbers or large—to discuss the implications of the king's action, fearful of acting in a manner that would destabilize the monarchy.

Reports that were later published stated that owners of printing establishments had closed their shops to protest the restrictive press ordinance, but these accounts have no basis in reality. The establishments that did close down seem to have done so more because they feared prosecution by the authorities than as a "strike" against the king's directives. In short, the middle classes behaved with the characteristic cowardice that marked their behavior in the face of any assault on their freedoms.

Initially, in fact, the Parisian public seemed to be quite indifferent to the coup. Monday, July 26, was a very hot day and, for workers in certain trades, a holiday. Large crowds flocked out of doors, seeking relief from the sweltering weather. They were not protestors, let alone insurgents, and seemed completely indifferent to the king's ordinances, which, after all, affected only a small well-to-do minority of the population. Journalists and editors from a variety of periodicals, to be sure, did flock to the offices of the moderate *National*, which published a protest calling upon the people of France to refuse to pay taxes (a futile gesture that was not obeyed). Once the excited gathering at the *National*'s offices managed to sort itself out, it established a committee to draw up a protest against the ordinances. Written by the young Adolphe Thiers, a constitutional monarchist, it vaguely called for disobedience in response to the king's action. After a great deal of bickering, the document was signed by journalists and editors of eleven leading periodicals in the capital, but beyond this gesture, none of the meetings that ensued in the late afternoon and evening, or even the following day, could produce agreement on a concrete form of action.

In the meantime, the king, his ministers, and officials in various governmental departments rested in the serene belief that the ordinances would evoke very little public response. None of the commanding generals in the country's military districts were ordered to mobilize any troops, nor were any special measures taken to prepare the police for public disorders. On Monday the king, confident that the country was indifferent to his coup, followed his normal daily routine: he attended morning mass and then went hunting with the dauphin. In the evening the royal party returned to the palace, where they dined and spent the evening playing cards.

As for the holiday crowds in the streets, they too were quiescent for most of



that Monday, July 26. Not even printers, faced with the loss of work, who took to the streets in angry protest, could persuade passersby to join them. But whatever catalyst it is that turns mildly curious crowds into protestors and protestors into insurrectionaries was very much at work on Monday evening. In the garden of the Palais Royal, a small crowd gathered before a print shop to read some verses posted in the window, when police officers arrived to close down the establishment, presumably because of an offense it had committed against the new press restrictions. As the curious crowd multiplied in number, it became unruly, booing the officers and shouting, "Long live the Charte!" and, striking a new and dangerous note, "Down with the Bourbons!" An entirely spontaneous demonstration sprang up. The gendarmes, trained for crowd control, arrived in force, arrested eight resisting demonstrators, and cleared the garden and closed its gates.

But the crowd did not disperse—indeed, it reformed in the square of the Palais Royal. A number of rioters ran up the Rue de Rivoli, breaking streetlamps and shouting denunciations of the ministry, singling out Polignac in particular for condemnation. When the crowd reached the Ministry of Finance, it became violent, throwing stones at the guards and breaking office windows. Still another group, chanting denunciations of the ordinances, marched past the Ministry of Justice, where Polignac and four of his ministers were conferring on how to control the growing unrest. After moving off to the main boulevards, it dispersed. By midnight, in fact, the city was deceptively calm, and the Prefect of Police reported that tranquillity had been restored. Small-scale riots had been seen before in Paris, and the authorities thought they had no reason to view these ones with any alarm.

But a major insurrection was in the offing. On the morning of Tuesday, June 27, crowds more menacing than those of the day before began to collect in the streets and squares of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the crucible of Parisian *journées* during the Great Revolution, while bands of printers roamed the streets of the capital, calling on workers to support their protest. As the Palais Royal filled once again with angry crowds, the police tried to close the gates, scattering protestors into the surrounding squares and streets. The mounted gendarmes, whom the authorities had sent to the square to prevent further trouble, themselves provoked unrest irritated by the heat and losing patience with the taunting crowds, they began to fire on the people. Fatally, the government had spilled blood, and the bodies of the revolution's first martyrs were paraded through the streets with cries of "Death to the ministers!" and "Death to Polignac!"

What had begun as protests and scattered riots soon turned into an armed confrontation between the government and especially the workers of Paris. The king reacted to the gendarmerie's shootings by appointing Auguste de Marmont, Duke of Raguse, to command the security forces. Among most

Parisians. Marmont was particularly detested for abandoning Napoleon in April 1814 and defecting to the Allies. In fact, his very name had become a synonym (a "Ragusard") for "opportunist" and "traitor." The duke reacted forcefully to the shootings by sending out the entire Parisian garrison—royal guards, gendarmes, and troops of the line—to occupy the capital's major squares and avenues—a provocative action that only stoked the crowd's fury.

Finally, on Tuesday, July 27, the sporadic demonstrations ignited into a widespread insurrection. To slow down the movement of Marmont's columns toward their prescribed destinations, barricades were reared all over the working-class districts in the central part of the right bank, where most of the government buildings were located. By seven o'clock in the evening, the troops were indiscriminately using their firearms against crowds that pelted them with stones, adding to the toll of the revolution's martyrs. At twilight, far from diminishing, the crowds swelled, using the cover of night to ransack gun shops. Systematically blotting out the streetlamps, they plunged the insurrectionary parts of the capital into total darkness, enabling them to build their defenses and find weapons with impunity.

The crowd behaved with remarkable judiciousness and discrimination toward the various armed forces deployed against them, probably because many of the older insurrectionaries were veterans of the Napoleonic Wars and were possessed of a degree of political consciousness. They realized that in this situation the loyalties of the troops of the line—ordinary soldiers—were uncertain, as those of the hated gendarmes and royal guards were not. If the crowd behaved well toward the soldiers, they might cross over to the side of the people. Shrewdly they raised the cry, "Long live the line! Down with the gendarmes and the guard!" Demonstrators stayed at their barricades until around ten o'clock, when they began to return home for the night. By midnight, the crowds had all but disappeared. The authorities, thinking the lull meant the end of resistance, reduced their troop levels to mere street patrols near the Tuileries and the Place de la Bastille, while Marmont assured the imperturbable king that the uprising had been snuffed out.

But on Wednesday morning, July 28, the crowds reappeared in full force in the central districts. Indeed, they were even more numerous and threatening, as Marmont nervously reported, than they had been before. They were building ever more elaborate barricades in ever greater earnest—felling trees, pulling up paving stones, and overturning wagons and market stalls to construct them. Troops that tried to pass through the insurrectionary *arrondissements* met with furious resistance. In the narrow streets adjoining the squares and boulevards, the columns were blocked by one barricade after another along their lines of advance. Each time they were halted, they were exposed to fire from insurgent muskets in adjacent houses and to barrages of paving stones, furniture, and tiles from the rooftops. Even when the troops succeeded in demolishing a



barricade, a new one would quickly spring up in their rear, trapping them, so that they were sandwiched within the narrow streets and caught in murderous crossfire.

At around eleven a.m. a crowd in the Place de Grève overwhelmed the guard post before the Hôtel de Ville, forced open the gates, and invaded the aged labyrinthine building, causing the prefect to flee. The National Guard, which Charles had disbanded in 1827 as a politically unreliable force, reappeared and occupied the city hall. Atop the building, in the central cupola, they replaced the white Bourbon flag with the outlawed tricolor as a symbol of revolutionary victory. Indeed, in one of their most inspired actions, the insurgents raised the tricolor on a tower of Notre Dame as well, where it could be seen by most residents of the city. The soldiers of the line, surrounded by friendly crowds, began to fraternize with the workers. By noon Marmont, hearing reports of this dangerous development, sent out his troops in larger units, in order to prevent small groups of soldiers from defecting. Battalion- and regiment-sized columns supported by artillery thus sallied forth to reclaim the city's center, its strategic avenues, and the Hôtel de Ville. Despite some short-lived advances, the results were disastrous for the Bourbon monarchy.

The Napoleonic veterans seem to have provided the insurgents with a degree of tactical flexibility that was lacking among their opponents' officers. A direct confrontation on an open battlefield would have surely led to their defeat, but from the roofs and windows of their own apartment buildings, the insurgents could rain tiles and pavés as well as bullets onto the hated guards and gendarmerie. With their intimate knowledge of their mazelike neighborhoods, they could establish communication links between barricades and strong-points, transforming large parts of the city into one vast revolutionary fortress. Troops were lured into confusing blind alleys and intricate passages where, despite their superior arms and training, they were placed on the defensive against the knowledgeable and agile insurgents. By July 29, a traveler who walked from the northern part of Paris toward the center of the city would have encountered barricades on nearly every street, at intervals of thirty feet or so, some of formidable size. Rareties during the Great Revolution, more barricades were reared in July 1830 than in any Parisian insurrection before or since.

Everywhere insurgent sniper fire took its demoralizing toll. Some commanders, especially those of the Swiss mercenary units in the Royal Guard, were unfamiliar with the winding streets, alleys, and cul-de-sacs of Paris, so that their forces lost nearly all communication with nearby troops. Even protective structures proved to be traps. The Swiss Guards seeking to retake the Hôtel de Ville from the National Guards found themselves hopelessly surrounded by armed crowds in the Place de Grève and fired upon from the building. When the Swiss finally succeeded in taking the city hall, they soon found that they could get no reinforcements or supplies. Ordered to depart,

most of the Swiss had to fight their way back to the outskirts of the city, once again barraged by fire from nearby buildings and narrow streets.

Finally, lacking food, drink, and even ammunition, Marmont's forces grew ever more demoralized. The widespread revolt of the populace now seemed beyond their power to vanquish. At length, before Wednesday was out, nearly all the key government areas had fallen into insurgent hands, leaving only a single route open to troop movements. The columns that Marmont had sent into strategic areas during the previous day were thinned out not only by casualties but—perhaps more importantly—by a steady flow of defections. The loyalty of entire regiments was now totally unreliable. Units that had managed to pass through the barricaded streets found that they were confined to mere plazas, a few broad avenues, and government buildings, while the maze of streets surrounding them were held fast by the insurgents. Attempts by Marmont's troops to subdue the densely populated areas that surrounded the seats of government were met with fierce but calculated resistance, and even the neighborhoods that Marmont's troops had apparently conquered were quickly reclaimed after the soldiers moved on.

By Thursday, July 29, the army had essentially been defeated. Even units of the normally reliable Royal Guards now refused to fight the populace. Moreover, any fears that loyal troops from the provinces would arrive to reinforce the Parisian garrison were dispelled as the provincials en route not only refused to supply the troops with food and drink but even attacked them along the roads. What remained of Marmont's forces on this last day of the insurrection were either withdrawn to the outskirts of the city or fled of their own accord.

Some 2,000 people had died during the "three glorious days," from Tuesday to Thursday. The overwhelming majority, some 1,800, were artisans, principally carpenters and joiners, cabinetmakers, stonemasons, shoemakers, locksmiths, jewelry makers, printers, and tailors. The middle classes do not seem to have played a consequential role in the fighting, judging from claims for compensation that wounded insurgents put in to the Commission des Récompenses Nationales after the uprising. During the street fighting class divisions had been marked, even in single buildings, let alone neighborhoods. Well-to-do royalists who rented apartments on the lower floors of the tenements, for example, provided food and drink for the troops trying to suppress the insurrection, while the workers who lived on the upper floors fought the same troops with weapons and stones from their windows and roofs. As David H. Pinkney sardonically observes:

In the so-called Bourgeois Revolution of 1830 the middle and upper bourgeoisie were either immune to bullets or absent from the firing line. Immunity is improbable, however, for some bourgeois met their ends as



uninvolved bystanders. ... On the ... list of dead [compiled by the Commission des Récompenses Nationales] were one doctor and one teacher but no bankers, no lawyers, no deputies, no publishers or journalists, although one source listed one journalist dead. A few from this class do figure among the wounded and other combatants—four doctors, one lawyer, and eight teachers but no journalists, no publishers, no deputies—and all combined their numbers do not even approach the number of masons or of cabinetmakers alone. The top-hatted bourgeois on the barricade in Ferdinand Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People" scarcely deserves his conspicuous place, certainly not as a symbol of his kind in this perilous spot.<sup>2</sup>

## THE UNRESOLVED REVOLUTION

In the week that followed the uprising, the defeated king and his entourage departed Paris, drifting slowly to the Channel ports and exile in England. To replace him, journalists, publishers, deputies, and, above all, dispossessed Bonapartist bureaucrats and officers were only too eager to use the popular uprising carried on and won by the workers of Paris to erect a regime that would be sympathetic to their own interests and prestige.

As we have seen, the Parisian liberals were republicans of various hues, some of them ostensibly Jacobin in spirit. On July 29 they were still nervously debating the course of the revolution, rather than leading it on the barricades. But with the collapse of the royal defense of the city, they hastily draped themselves in the old tricolor and, joining with the constitutional monarchists, took the step of choosing a Municipal Commission, with members including Périer, the banker. Charged by the subdued Chamber of Deputies to provision and defend the capital and maintain order, this Commission—and it noticeably did not call itself a Commune, as revolutionary tradition prescribed—installed itself in the Hôtel de Ville and began to sort out the extent of its authority.

The military power in Paris now consisted of two forces: the unorganized armed workers and the National Guard. As the only organized military force in Paris, the Guard was commanded by a constitutional monarchist, the Marquis de Lafayette, who, in his dubious transformation into a republican leader, had assiduously undertaken the job of holding at bay the more radical tendencies among the republican students, workers, National Guards, and Bonapartists. Among the disorganized forces of the worker-insurgents, there was no potential leader who could match Lafayette's prestige and reputation. Thus when Lafayette ordered the muskets of the National Guard to back up the Municipal

Commission, he ensured that the Commission was the sole administrative power in Paris. Like the Chamber of Deputies, the Commission favored the establishment of a liberal constitutional monarchy along the British parliamentary model. But who would fill the required role of monarch? The choice was made not by the insurrectionaries but by the banker Laffitte, his journalist colleague Thiers, and the historian François Guizot, who formed a cabal to promote the candidacy of Louis-Philippe, the Duke of Orleans. The duke was the son of Louis XVI's rival, Philippe Egalité, who during the Great Revolution had abandoned his lofty title to support the First Republic.

Egalité's renunciation, however, had not saved him from the guillotine, a fate that made his son, Louis-Philippe, all the more prudent. The Orleanists, as his supporters were called, and the republican "men of order" such as Lafayette, who upheld the leadership of the Municipal Commission, feared that any republic would necessarily become a terroristic Jacobin regime. Laffitte and Thiers thereupon entered into negotiations to bring Louis-Philippe to the throne under the title "citizen king" or, more absurdly, the "king of the barricades"—despite the fact that during the street fighting the Duke of Orleans had abandoned the embattled capital for his safe retreat at Neuilly. In the political labyrinth after the insurrection, posters all over Paris were hailing him as the most suitable successor to Charles—a propaganda enterprise guided by Thiers and apparently financed by Laffitte. Finally, with the guidance of his liberal advisers, none of whom had been active participants in the uprising, the duke began to sidle his way toward the throne.

What finally validated Louis-Philippe as a king "surrounded by republican institutions" (as his supporters were to put it) was Lafayette's public embrace of him at the Hôtel de Ville on July 31. Lest the crowd that gathered outside—which seemed to prefer a republic—get out of control and act on its own, Lafayette, as Chateaubriand tells us in his memoirs, "gave the Duc d'Orleans a tricolor flag, went out on the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville, and embraced the Prince before the eyes of the astounded crowd, while the Duke waved the national flag." One of the more principled royalists, Chateaubriand sardonically concludes: "The republican kiss of Lafayette created a king."<sup>3</sup>

Far from exhibiting any reluctance, Lafayette was only too willing to accept the duke as a monarch, a crass betrayal of the hopes of many of the workers who had made the 1830 Revolution. Indeed, Chateaubriand's account takes note of the astonishment of the crowd at the action, not the "cheers" that some historians attribute to them. Thus, Lafayette once again showed himself to be a constitutional monarchist whose commitment to a republican government was largely rhetorical. Soon thereafter, nearly everyone in the new government apparently wanted to be rid of this relic of 1789. After being granted the vacuous title of "Honorary Commanding-General of the National Guard of the Kingdom," which the seventy-three-year-old marquis considered



an insult, he resigned from his command and virtually disappeared from the political scene.

On August 9, scarcely a week after Lafayette's demonstrative blessing, Louis-Philippe, with the agreement of the Chambers of Deputies and Peers, was crowned sovereign. The coronation, which took place at the Palais Bourbon (the seat of the Chamber), was deliberately marked by an almost puritanical simplicity, in stark contrast to Charles's ornate ceremony at the Cathedral of Rheims. In a largely civil ceremony that referred to "the will of the people" rather than "divine right," the new monarch pledged to uphold the *Charte*, which itself was liberalized by the removal of the noxious preamble stating the document was a "voluntary" gift from the crown. The revisions also limited hereditary membership in the Chamber of Peers, lowered the voting age from 30 to 25, and reduced the tax qualifications for the franchise from 300 francs to 200. The Chamber of Deputies was instructed to pass laws to abolish press censorship and require jury trials instead of arbitrary judgments for journalistic malleasances. Even education was made a state rather than a Church affair throughout the country, when the Chamber of Deputies appropriated funds to afford secular primary schools to communes instead of churches.

In deference to romantic nostalgia, the tricolor was made the official symbol of France. Louis-Philippe, in turn, pledged to "govern only by the laws and according to the laws."<sup>4</sup> Amid cries of "Long live the king!" and "Long live Louis-Philippe I," the duke accepted the crown, the scepter, and the royal sword from the peers and deputies, dutifully signing in triplicate the declarations endowing him with his new status, much as though they were a commercial contract. In this prosaic businesslike fashion, which presumably represented the triumph of republican virtue over absolutism, the duke accepted the throne as "king of the French" rather than "king of France."

A calculating man, Louis-Philippe had traveled widely during his years of exile, even to the United States, and had spent his time patiently waiting for events to unfold on his behalf. When Villèle's compensation law was passed in 1825, he had duly regained the considerable landed properties that had been expropriated from his family, recouping much of his family fortune, and he rose to high position in the Bourbon regime. Indeed, the king's behavior reflected a new kind of Frenchman that Honoré de Balzac was depicting in his novels. Despite his aristocratic pedigree, in his habits Louis-Philippe was a parsimonious and stolid bourgeois, cautious about advancing himself; indeed, even after he was established as king, he retained a cordial attitude toward ordinary people, who freely visited the royal palace as though it were a public institution. In his dress the "citizen king" was plain, and his reign—the July Monarchy, as it was called—was free of ostentation. Fortunately for the new monarch, moreover, France began to recover from the economic depression

that had plagued her in the late 1820s and early 1830s and began to enjoy a period of relative prosperity.

But the new electoral law of April 1831, heralded as an Orleanist reform measure, still deprived the vast majority of adults of the franchise: only 166,000 out of 9 million adults were able to meet the 200-franc cns that made them eligible to vote. "The situation may have been even worse than the figures show," notes Priscilla Robertson, "but at any rate small and middling businessmen were excluded along with the learned and professional classes and, of course, the workers and peasants."<sup>5</sup> Disqualified Frenchmen could look with envy across the Channel, where the Reform Bill of 1832, for all its shortcomings, had expanded the English electorate by about 50 percent to some 750,000. Although 32 per thousand now had the franchise in Britain, a mere 5 per thousand could vote in France. To demands for a more representative suffrage, Guizot, the king's premier, arrogantly responded, "Enrich yourselves; then you can vote," with the result that as late as 1836, the Chamber of Deputies contained only 45 bankers, industrial capitalists, and merchants, as against 116 landed proprietors and parasitic rentiers.

Indeed, Marx's analysis of the 1830 Revolution as a shift in power from the landed nobility to the financial bourgeoisie is not supported by the reality that, apart from a few individuals, the financial and certainly the industrial bourgeoisie gained little power from the July Monarchy. The same landed nobility, especially local notables, who had formed the base of the Bourbon Restoration continued to constitute the base of the new monarchy, although their numbers were augmented by ex-Bonapartist officials and a few bourgeois. As William L. Langer remarks,

It is true that the July Revolution of 1830, which was started by Paris printers and fought out by craftsmen and artisans, was taken over by a group of adroit bankers, of whom Lafitte, Casimir-Périer, and Delessert were the most prominent. But when the excitement was over, it turned out that for the next eighteen years France was to be ruled not by bankers and industrialists but by provincial notables, by lawyers and by bureaucrats, many of whom were officers or officials of the Napoleonic regime. In 1837 there were hardly more than forty deputies who could be fairly described as members of the new industrial class.<sup>6</sup>

And as Pinkney tersely observes,

The new regime did differ from its predecessor in that there was a larger place in it for businessmen like Lafitte and Périer. . . . Nonetheless, political power was still firmly in the hands of the landed proprietors, the officeholders, and the professional men.<sup>7</sup>



On the other hand, the workers who had done all the fighting gained nothing whatsoever, politically or materially, from the very uprising that made possible the Orleanist regime. Having shattered Marmont's army in an insurrection, the "heroes of July" (as the artisans were called) were saddled with an electoral law that, in 1831, slammed the political door in their faces. Indeed, from the July days onward, the Orleanist regime was wary of working people, not only in Paris but in the rest of France as well. Actually, in December 1830 the heated conflict over the fate of the former Bourbon ministers, who were treated fairly benignly by the new monarchy, nearly threw the capital into another insurrection. By putting up a strong show of force, mobilizing the National Guard, and placing ordinary troops on alert, the government showed that it was quite prepared to use all the military force at its disposal to control the "anarchistes" (a word that cropped up in ministerial deliberations) who threatened public order. Following the crisis of the ex-ministers' trial, a rash of strikes and economic dislocations obliged the Parisian Municipal Commission to provide public works for thousands of unemployed, in order to allay public unrest.

Indeed, as radical republican groups began to conspire against the Orleanist regime and as assassins stalked the king, the government became more and more conservative. In April 1831, in response to riots and demonstrations, the Chamber of Deputies enacted legislation against unlawful meetings or so-called *attroupements* and resumed the prosecution of oppositional leaders. That most sacred cow of the liberals, namely freedom of the press, which had been affirmed by Louis-Philippe on accepting the throne, was repeatedly abridged from the autumn of 1830 until September 1834, when press limitations forbade not only the use of the word republic but even political caricatures. A Law on Association passed in 1834 required most societies—even those that contained fewer than twenty members, which the Bourbons had tolerated—to be authorized by the state before they could function legally. This law effectively quashed not only republican societies but even early trade unions seeking higher wages and better working conditions, as well as mutual aid societies. As Pamela Pilbeam observes, the Orleanists pursued "a policy of surveillance, prosecution and ultimately changes in the law on associations which made the new liberal regime even less tolerant than the Restoration."<sup>8</sup> Between ministries headed alternately by Guizot, the ever-adaptable Nicolas Soult (formerly a marshal of Napoleon), and the perennial enemy of rebellious workers Thiers, Orleanist commitments to freedom were steadily abridged.

Inasmuch as "political power was still firmly in the hands of the landed proprietors, the officeholders, and the professional men," Pinkney concludes, "... the July Days had effected no revolution in France." But the uprising had made "one revolutionary change, one that its principal beneficiaries had not intended and thoroughly deplored. It had brought the people, particularly the

people of Paris, back into politics in a way they had not been involved since the 1790s."<sup>9</sup>

## THE SECRET SOCIETIES

The crowds who watched Lafayette embrace the Duke of Orleans at the Hôtel de Ville chafed at the incompleteness of the July events, whose victory they reasonably felt was being brazenly snatched from them. Having risen against the detested Bourbon monarchy and defeated it once, working people were now acutely aware of their power. It was almost certainly the Revolution of 1830 that created the sizable French public for Buonarroti's account of the Babouvist conspiracy, which was published only two years before the July days. Buonarroti's book now fed a growing desire to turn to conspiratorial methods to overthrow the July Monarchy—and among the French revolutionaries of the period, none embodied this tendency more consistently and militantly than Blanqui. When the July insurrection exploded, Blanqui may already have been a republican—in any case, he abandoned his moderate journalist colleagues at the *Globe* and threw himself into the street fighting, brandishing a musket in one hand and a tricolor in the other. He was wounded, for which the Orleans government awarded him a decoration, but he emerged from the fighting as a red republican and rapidly evolved into a socialist.

In January 1832, while defending himself at a highly publicized trial for his radical views, he delivered a passionate speech that J. Tchernoff describes as "the first socialist manifesto of this epoch."<sup>10</sup> The July Monarchy, Blanqui said, was "the government of the bourgeois classes," and society was in "a state of war between rich and poor."<sup>11</sup> Asked by the president of the court to name his own "estate," or class, Blanqui answered forthrightly, "Proletaire." When the president denied that the proletariat was an estate, Blanqui roared, "How is it not an estate! It is the estate of thirty million Frenchmen who live by their labor and are deprived of political rights!"<sup>12</sup> The language of socialism was already very much in his mind as well as in the minds of a growing number of ordinary republicans in France.

An early arena for generating socialists was the secret republican society *Société des Amis du Peuple* (Society of the Friends of the People), inspired by the republican publicist Godefroy Cavaignac. The Amis, who were organized on July 30, immediately after the Paris street fighting, demanded that France be permitted to elect a new constituent assembly to decide the nature of the state, instead of restoring the old Chamber of Deputies. The many republican banquets and oratorical tournaments the society held challenged the legitimacy of the new monarchy, even attracting as many as a thousand people to their



meetings. In reality the Amis had only 150 committed members in Paris—Buonarrotti was among them, as was Blanqui, although how intimate they were remains unclear. More radical and larger than the Amis was the *Société des Droits de l'Homme* (Society for the Rights of Man), a highly disciplined offshoot of the Amis that, after 1832, managed to collect a considerable working-class following and extend its reach throughout the *arrondissements* of Paris and into some of the provinces. Hierarchically structured, the top level of the Droits was an eleven-man central committee, below which came twelve commissioners, one for each *arrondissement*, and below them another forty-eight commissioners, one for each of the four quarters into which each *arrondissement* was divided. The *quartiers*, in turn, were subdivided into sections, whose clubs claimed to be independent in order to evade government restrictions on membership in societies.

Clubs like the Amis and the Droits, which proliferated throughout France, were expressly republican and sometimes even socialistic in outlook. By 1833 the Droits claimed a total membership of 4000 in Paris, while its branch in Châlons, one of several outside the capital, had as many as 1500. Nor were these republican clubs mere debating societies. A number of them, including certain sections of the Droits, were armed, while others, particularly in the provinces, drilled and held target practice. The mushrooming of such revolutionary societies among artisans provided the upper classes with the excuse—and the need—to accept the repressive measures on association imposed by the Orleanist government.

On June 5, 1832, a funeral was held for Maximilien Lamarque, an immensely popular Bonapartist general on whom the exiled Napoleon had looked with such favor that he bequeathed upon him, on his deathbed at St. Helena, the honorific title of marshal. Now a cortege of thousands, led by several distinguished military men, including Lafayette, followed Lamarque's coffin as it wound its way to the Panthéon. Many who followed behind in the procession were members of revolutionary societies who expected, in the aftermath of the funeral, to stage a full-scale republican insurrection against the monarchy.

One of a party of students having exclaimed, "But, after all, whither are they leading us?" "To the republic," replied a person, wearing the July decoration, who was acting as chief of the troop, "and make yourself sure of this, that to-night we will sup in the Tuileries."<sup>13</sup>

The cortege stopped before a specially prepared scaffold to hear dignitaries deliver solemn eulogies to Lamarque, when suddenly, as Louis Blanc recounts,

a stranger came up, mounted on a horse, which he had great difficulty in getting through the immense concourse. The appearance of this man was most sinister; he was dressed in black, and held in his hand a red flag,

surmounted by a cap of liberty. It was the symbol of '93 that was thus revived before the eyes of the bourgeoisie.

The flag so disconcerted Lafayette that, although he was a close associate of Lamarque's, he abruptly left the funeral.

The indignation which this spectacle excited, was extreme, especially on the part of the republicans, whose principles this fearful apparition tended to misrepresent and throw a slur upon. One shout of reprobation burst from all present, with the exception of a few, who applauded, either with imbecile fanaticism, or with the treacherous purpose of throwing odium on the cause of the republic.

The man's appearance, in Blanc's view, succeeded in turning many members of the cortege against the prospective insurrection, by associating republicanism with "sanguinary jacobinism."

The red flag had produced its effect: he who bore it immediately disappeared; and from that moment, the republicans had to renounce the hope of drawing after their steps the bulk of the bourgeoisie.<sup>14</sup>

We will never know whether the horseman was a police provocateur or not, but his action did succeed in preventing a wide-scale insurrection that day.\* The more militant republicans in Paris, however, were not to be deterred: they went on, in spite of the horseman, to stage an uprising, raising huge barricades at some of the capital's key cross sections (vividly described by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*), exhibiting exceptional courage and panicking many members of the government. As it turned out, however, Louis-Philippe was well prepared to confront any insurrection: he had about 24,000 troops at his disposal, as well as most of the National Guard. On June 6, after two days of valiant but futile street fighting on the part of the rebels, the uprising was crushed.

Following the June 1832 uprising, societies that had enjoyed a semilegal status were driven completely underground, but the more stringently the societies were repressed, the more broadly socialistic ideas spread among the red republicans. Soon the newly formed socialist societies were collaborating with the older republican societies, interpenetrating one another with joint conspiracies and actions. By hounding these republican and socialist groups

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\* Although the appearance of the horseman at Lamarque's funeral cortege has been cited as the first time the red flag was raised in Paris, it had already been raised the year before, in 1831, in an insurrection at Lyon, and it was to reappear in French uprisings throughout the 1830s.



alike, the Orleanist regime forced them to take desperate and often adventurist actions. But perhaps the most memorable of the underground societies, serving partly as an inspiration and partly as a model, were those created by Blanqui and his supporters. In the summer of 1834 (or 1835, according to some sources), Blanqui founded the *Société des Familles* (Society of the Families), a secret conspiratorial organization that was avowedly committed to orchestrating a coup d'état against the Orleanist monarchy. By 1836, the membership of the society, it has been estimated, numbered about 1200.

The structure of the *Familles*, again, was hierarchical, patterning itself on the classical organizational forms of the *charbonnerie*. Its basic unit was a six-to-twelve-member "family"; five or six families constituted a "section" under a chief; three or four sections made up a "quarter," led by a *commandant de quartier*; several quarters were led by an *agent révolutionnaire*. Finally, guiding this apparatus from above was a *Comité secret*, or central committee, whose membership was unknown to the rest of the organization. Actually, the central committee was more or less a fiction. The real command of the society consisted of three "revolutionary agents," the most notable of whom were Blanqui and Armand Barbès. Barbès, whom Max Nomad describes as "young, rich, enthusiastic, good-natured, and heroic—the idol of the student youth and popular with all the republic opponents of the regime,"<sup>15</sup> long remained, in his revolutionary career, a perpetual adolescent and reckless romantic. In fact, the *Familles* did not acquire much significance until Blanqui joined it around 1835.

Each member of a "family" was expected to join the National Guard, in order to gain military training, propagandize among the Guards, and if possible acquire a weapon and gunpowder. This typically Blanquist society had its own gunpowder laboratory (possibly two) in the very heart of Paris, as well as arms caches in different parts of the capital, and before the police learned of its existence, it had even begun to infiltrate two regiments of the Paris garrison. Upon its discovery Blanqui was arrested and jailed, but a year later he was released under a general amnesty and sent into a rather pleasant semibarbarism near Paris, where he had a brief period of domestic happiness with his beloved wife, Amélie-Suzanne (whose early death only a few years later cast a pall over Blanqui's many remaining years).

In exile Blanqui formed still another secret network, the *Société des Saisons* (Society of the Seasons), in collaboration with, once again, Barbès, and the printer Martin Bernard. More than the *Familles*, its membership grew to consist of a large percentage of workers. (Marx, in fact, regarded the society as exclusively proletarian, but this is probably a simplification.) Once again the *Saisons*, following the *Charbonnerie*, was organized into a hierarchy of levels of groups. This time individual conspirators were each named after a weekday, six

of whom together constituted a "week," led by "Sunday." Four weeks formed a "month"—under the command of "July"—and three months formed a "season," led by "spring." All four seasons together constituted a "year," which was directed by a "revolutionary agent." Since the society had about a thousand members, it consisted of three "years," each of which was led by a "revolutionary agent"—who happened, in fact, to be Blanqui, Barbès, and Bernard. This elaborate system of small units and centralized control was meant to neutralize any police infiltration and at the same time maximize the organization's coordination during the coup that it intended to stage, the date of which was known to no one but the top leaders.

Members of the *Saisons* engaged in training exercises for the coup amid the unknowing Sunday-afternoon crowds of Parisians who were enjoying their day off out of doors. These insurrectionary exercises were conducted under the close supervision of Blanqui, who, in his black coat and black gloves, would calmly assess the strengths and weakness of his future insurgents, often from a café window as they passed by. The moment of truth for the *Saisons* finally came on the morning of May 12, 1839, when the conspirators raided gunsmith shops and seized the Palais de Justice and the Hôtel de Ville, proclaiming a republic and wildly singing the "Marseillaise." The National and Municipal Guards were quickly mobilized, driving the insurgents behind barricades in the workers' districts. Despite the *Saisons'* largely working-class following, ordinary working people remained passive, abstaining from participation in the uprising. Two patently hopeless days later, the entire enterprise collapsed, with no impact upon the Parisian working class.

After five months of hiding in cellars and attics, Blanqui was caught and condemned to death, a sentence that was commuted to life imprisonment. The conspirator was confined to the island fortress of Mont Saint-Michel and later to a prison hospital at Tours, from which he was released in 1844 because of his fragile health. Although he had planned the May uprising in every detail, he seems to have developed doubts about its chances for success once it was under way. In any case, when it became clear to Blanqui that the uprising would be a failure, he prudently but reprehensibly withdrew himself from the action—an act that led to an irreconcilable break between himself and the more adventurous Barbès, who had been wounded in the fighting.

Despite its failure, the *Saisons* conspiracy was to seize the imagination of later revolutionaries, including anarchists, and it may have supplied the conspiratorial atmosphere for novels on anarchist terrorism written by distinguished authors from Dostoyevsky to Conrad. Blanqui, to be sure, was no anarchist; indeed, the leaders of the *Saisons* hoped ultimately to preside over a highly centralized revolutionary state. But the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will or People's Freedom—the Russian word *volya* has both meanings), the populist and terrorist organization that assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881, was



influenced by Peter Tkachev, one of Blanqui's collaborators. The notion that small groups, if not individual conspirators, could initiate sweeping revolutionary events through heroic actions is a legacy of early Blanquism—however much Blanqui himself, over time, arrived at a more realistic appraisal of the limits of secret conspiratorial organizations.

In fact, by the 1840s, in the face of repeated defeats, arrests, and repression, popular belief in the effectiveness of Blanquist conspiratorialism was diminishing. The regime shrewdly exploited the conspiracies and various attempts to assassinate Louis-Philippe in order to arouse public opinion against republicanism and socialism. Whether because of this repression or for other reasons, the secret societies awakened no mass movement against the July Monarchy. For the most part, the workers of France had a traditional agenda of their own—to retain control over their working conditions, indeed to establish cooperative workshops that implicitly challenged the legitimacy of the property system itself, as well as to live decently and with self-respect. In time, once sweeping transformations had occurred in the economic and political landscape of Western Europe, they were to flock into socialistic organizations that sought to create a better society by other means.

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## NOTES

1. Mardal de Guernon-Ranville, *Journal d'un ministre* (Caen, 1873), quoted in David M. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 75.

2. Pinkney, *French Revolution of 1830*, pp. 255-6.

3. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Paris, n.d.), quoted in Arnold Whitridge, *Men in Crisis: The Revolutions of 1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 21.

4. Quoted in Pinkney, *French Revolution of 1830*, p. 194.

5. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 15.

6. William L. Langer, *Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 52.

7. Pinkney, *French Revolution of 1830*, p. 367.

8. Pamela Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 93.

9. Pinkney, *French Revolution of 1830*, p. 367.

10. J. Tchernoff, *Le Parti républicain sous la monarchie de juillet* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1901), p. 261; quoted by Alan B. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 6.

11. Blanqui quoted in Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 47.

12. Quoted by Maurice Dommanget, *Auguste Blanqui: Des Origines à la révolution de 1848: Premiers combats et premières prisons* (Paris and La Haye: Mouton, 1969), p. 99.

Even more than Danton a half-century earlier, Blanqui developed the technique of turning the tables on prosecutors and judges, transforming the accused into the accuser and his trials into forums for advancing his ideas. His stays in prison, too, became educational experiences for other political prisoners, many of whom he recruited to his ideas.

13. Louis Blanc, *The History of Ten Years: 1830 to 1840*, vol. 2 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1845), p. 30.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2. Blanc's apparently firsthand account seems more reliable than others that place the red flag, not in the hand of the anonymous "stranger," but on Lamarque's coffin. This would have been impossible, especially since Lafayette, one of the leading figures in the cortege, certainly would never have assented to such a gesture.

15. Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 27.



PART VI



# THE BARRICADES OF PARIS



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## CHAPTER 25 The Revolution of February 1848

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The French Revolution of 1830 sent shock waves throughout Europe. In Britain, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain, as well as a number of states in the German Confederation, movements for the reform of dynasties or monarchies flared up, sometimes taking the form of insurrections. But most of these reforms were nationalist in character, or liberal—seeking to broaden political rights—or both, rather than social uprisings, in which the masses fought for a radically new economic as well as political dispensation. In time, nagging problems of national unification were resolved, not by popular insurgencies but by forceful statesmen, such as Cavour in Italy and Bismarck in Germany, who fulfilled the aspirations of established monarchs rather than those of quasi-democratic popular movements.

It was almost exclusively in France, in the nineteenth century, and usually in Paris, that mass armed revolts transcended essentially nationalist goals and focused on the “social question” of economic exploitation, class rule, and property ownership. As we have seen, the Great Revolution had by no means eliminated all of the social arrangements of the *ancien régime*. Ironically, in fact, it was not only the traditions of 1789 but France’s very economic backwardness, at least by comparison with England, that made it a hotbed of revolution and radical ideologies.

### THE PERSISTENCE OF OLD FRANCE

Despite the economic and technological changes that took place very noticeably in the 1840s, the propertied classes of France—the middle classes as well as the nobility—still equated prestige and power with the ownership of land. Even the



bourgeoisie, with or without titles, aspired to the ownership of large estates, which alone would gain it a privileged position in the management of the country. Admittedly, this high regard for land ownership was diminished in French cities, particularly in Paris, where commerce and banking flourished. Certainly in the capital, talented men with fairly plebeian origins such as Jacques Laffitte, Casimir Périer, Adolphe Thiers, and François Guizot—bankers, journalists, and academics—attained positions of prominence in national affairs; nor were these men denied entry into aristocratic circles, or even the opportunity to marry into the nobility, as trade and finance became ever more lucrative sources of income.

But in the rural areas and the small towns, French provincial and municipal affairs were almost completely controlled by landed notables, who despised urban businessmen and ruled over the peasantry and craftsmen of their districts with prerevolutionary arrogance. Together with the clergy, they dispensed favors and issued directives as though the Revolution of 1789 had never occurred. Nor were their claims to local sovereignty seriously challenged by the peasantry and lesser urban classes, who viewed titles and the ownership of landed property with subservient awe, especially in the royalist hotbeds of the west and south.

That a great deal of power was exercised on the provincial and even the local level was not politically trivial. During the 1830s France was still a comparatively decentralized country—in some respects barely a modern nation-state. Travel conditions outside the great urban hubs were very primitive, leaving many parts of the country isolated and under the dominion of local landowners. Despite a considerable amount of road and canal construction during the Restoration, "in the 1830s the nation's transportation system . . . was still that of the eighteenth century," as David Pinkney pointedly observes.<sup>1</sup>

In 1830, for example, stagecoaches still moved at an average speed of four miles per hour, and it took ten to twenty days for freight wagons to move from Paris to Orleans. A steamship journey up the Rhône from Arles to Lyon required three to four days, and even more if the river was swollen by flooding or shrouded in fog. In winter, when ice clogged the waterway, traffic might be suspended entirely for a week. Travel along canals, whose construction tripled under the Orleans monarchy, still faced all the riverine difficulties of weather, flooding, and drought. Rural France thus had only limited, and usually very little, contact with the capital. The affairs of large areas of the country were necessarily left in the hands of the local aristocracy—many of whom remained Legitimists, that is, supporters of the old Bourbon dynasty to which Louis XVI and his brothers belonged.

The continuities with the past, it should be emphasized, encompassed not only regional isolation, poor roads, and strong feelings of provincialism but a

fairly primitive banking system. By continuing to invest mainly in safe government bonds and low-risk securities that brought short-term returns, this system impeded the growth of more mechanized, capital-intensive enterprises. Even small enterprises such as the production of iron in charcoal-fueled furnaces (which still supplied most of the country's iron) had to rely on overly cautious local banks or else be self-financed. The larger coal-fueled plants, so necessary for the production of iron for locomotives and railroad tracks, required large capital investments that vastly exceeded the capacity of most local financial institutions. Indeed, not until the Paris—Saint-Germain Railroad proved to be a financial success were the large Parisian banks prepared to invest heavily in railroad construction or trade in railroad shares on the Paris Bourse.

Finally, any attempt by a peasant household to improve its lot beyond subsistence farming came up against the resistance of local financial institutions, which were extremely reluctant to make low-interest loans to small-scale food cultivators. French peasant agriculture consequently stagnated, imprisoned in quasi-medieval forms of finance, such as high-interest loans from small-town notaries, with the result that peasants were still easy prey to their traditional vicissitudes, such as bad harvests and droughts. Indeed, even in an age of railroads, steamships, and factories, food shortages, so redolent of the ancien régime, were still serious problems.

For those who had wealth, the purchase of land usually left insufficient capital for industrial growth or even sophisticated agricultural techniques. The real measure of a family's wealth continued to be the amount of acreage it owned rather than the level of its agricultural productivity. "The values and aspirations of the bourgeoisie were still predominantly those associated with landowners and not those of businessmen or the English captains of industry," notes Pinkney, "fully committed to the pursuit of profit and to a regimen of work."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless France could not resist change altogether, least of all during the latter decade of the July Monarchy. Economically, despite the overwhelmingly artisanal nature of the manufacturing economy, industrial advances could not be avoided, but by no means could they be instituted on a scale comparable to English industry. The north was home to the mechanized production of cotton cloth; the Loire basin was greatly expanding its production of coal; and the small forges that had formerly accounted for much of the country's iron output were consolidated into large-scale foundries, presaging the Industrial Revolution that had already swept over parts of Britain.

Perhaps of greatest significance, railroads began to come into their own, reaching isolated regions that had previously been all but completely closed off to trade. The passage of the 1842 Dufaure railway law mandated the formation of a national railway network, in which land, track, and stations were to be supplied by the government, then leased to private companies that would



provide the necessary operating equipment and rolling stock. Between 1842 and 1848, the amount of track in France tripled from roughly 600 to 1800 kilometers. It was a first step in overcoming the isolation of the French regions and at the same time provided a stimulus to the metallurgical industry, so indispensable to modernization.

Politically, however, the regime of Louis-Philippe was closed to everyone but a few wealthy citizens; by the election law of 1831, only those Frenchmen could vote who paid taxes of at least 200 francs—a franchise qualification that effectively barred all but 250,000 out of 9 million adult males from voting. Such franchise reforms as were proposed in the Chamber of Deputies did not apply to the working class, which all parties in the government seemed to assume should be barred from electoral participation. Morally, the regime had become scandalously corrupt, with bribery and dishonesty rampant at all levels of government, including the military. The July Monarchy was, in effect, a huge holding company, as Marx called it, for stockbrokers and financiers who had been reaping immense fortunes ever since Louis-Philippe ascended the throne. It boldly justified its existence by the extremely favorable and privileged environment it created for the rising bourgeoisie and rural *nouveaux riches*. Commercialism had become the ruling ethos of the elite, and the propertied classes proceeded to gorge themselves financially, through shamelessly lucrative contracts, reckless speculation, and shady loans, generating enormous discrepancies in wealth throughout the country.

## THE ASSOCIATIONIST DEMANDS OF THE 1840s

In the years directly following the Great Revolution, France had preserved its predominantly artisanal economy, so that the manufacturing sector of the French economy was still overwhelmingly made up of craftsmen. Although their economic position had changed somewhat between 1789 and 1840, the interests and status of artisans had remained surprisingly constant. Even Paris, as we have seen, had hardly changed during the fifty years that passed since the Bastille was taken, and the methods of manufacturing production, even working-class lifeways, were remarkably similar to those of two generations earlier.

Master artisans usually owned their own tools and managed their own shops, using the labor of their families, apprentices, and journeymen for assistance in production. Allowing for differences among individuals, they shared certain basic values, habits, and hopes. Those who did not own property aspired, in time, to acquire their own workshops and enjoy the status of master craftsmen. The more well-to-do master artisans worked side by side with

apprentices, journeymen, and hired workers, who not only shared their ideas, hopes, and lifeways but often lived in their homes and shared their meals.

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, social forces emerged to threaten these independent artisanal lifeways: new technologies, most notably rail transportation, opened hitherto isolated markets to cheap mass-produced goods from abroad and at home. Merchant capitalists were becoming more central figures in economic life, especially those who paid for the artisans' products at a given rate, then traveled elsewhere to sell them. Increasingly these merchants began to control the allocation of jobs and the prices that artisans received for their goods, often with little or no concern for the needs of their producers. As the merchants' role became even more pronounced with the expansion of trade, they threatened to reduce the artisans to a lowly, dependent status, at the beck and call of bourgeois masters. At the same time the industrial capitalist world was poised to invade their craft world, threatening to replace it with the factory system.

These looming changes raised several basic questions that urgently had to be addressed. What would be the place of artisanal workers in the changing economic and political life of France? How could they deflect the cruel impact of a harshly competitive market economy? Could they, as artisans, create an alternative to the emerging predatory and competitive capitalist economy?

A spate of communist and socialist books and pamphlets were published that tried to address these searing questions. But following the Revolution of 1830, experience and need counted almost as much as theory in persuading militant French workers to join together in organizations of associated or cooperative production that were known as "associations." The popularity of the word *association*, instead of the more archaic, prerevolutionary word *corporation*, was due in no small part to the writings of Fourierists, and especially Buchez, in his very popular public lectures in the autumn of 1830.

Precisely when French workers began to form associations differs from one historian to another. According to Bernard Moss, "Associationism was born during the wave of strikes and organized protests provoked by the Revolution of 1830"—specifically, with the large wave of strikes that swept over French cities, particularly Paris, in 1833.<sup>3</sup> William Sewell, on the other hand, dates associations back to workers' philanthropic societies of the previous century, which were then revived after 1831. What is clear is that in 1833 an economic upswing, and an accompanying strike wave, began to generate a strong associationist movement among French workers. Idled by work stoppages, the strikers formed cooperative associations simply in order to earn an income.

It was worker-militants who formulated the organizational contours of these new entities. In 1833 a militant shoemaker known to us only as Ephraïm called upon the "workers of an *état* [to] form a corps among themselves; they must choose, from the midst of that society, a commission charged with representing



it in debates with the masters, to fix wages according to *tarifs* [contracts specifying wage rates], discussed and decreed by its members."<sup>4</sup> The words *état* and *corps* are evidence of the archaisms that persisted in artisans' language and thinking, but the intention of an association like Ephraem's is patently clear: essentially it was to be a labor union. Although such associations were often marked by initiation ceremonies, rites, secret signals, and shared festivities, they were hardly socialistic entities.

Indeed, associations seem to have emerged out of the simple trade unions that workers formed to advance their interests during the course of the strikes. To conduct a strike, workers had to eat and provide their families with the means of life. Associations that functioned as labor unions or mutual aid societies could make some such provisions for their survival. But as strikes intensified, striking workers took the function of their associations further. Striking shoemakers, tailors, and cabinetmakers in various French cities actually formed producers' associations or cooperative workshops, by which they could gain employment to support themselves during strikes, until their masters or the merchants to whom they sold their goods agreed to an acceptable *tarif*. Most of these producers' cooperatives were not long-lived; as Sewell tells us, they

were not envisaged as continuing beyond the end of the strike. Even the most ambitious—such as the "national workshop" that was formed by the Parisian tailors during their long strike of October and November [1833], which they saw as becoming a permanent part of the tailors' corporation—were conceived of as strictly a subordinate arm of the overall workers' corporation [i.e., trade union of a single trade].<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, a limited form of association, that had been little more than a prototypical trade union, had mutated under strike conditions into a collectivistic producers' association. In response to the discontent of workers expressed in such strikes and associations, the government passed a Law of Association in 1834 that prohibited associations of all but the most innocuous sort. For the rest of the 1830s and the 1840s, producers' cooperatives and collectivist associations, which had been formed only during strikes in actual practice, were elevated to a major component of the ideology of artisanal socialism. This ideology envisioned a socialist society based on cooperative production and distribution, whose economy would be structured around producers' associations.

Moreover, these associations would be confederally interlinked into a "fraternity" of all trades. In a pamphlet titled *On the Association of Workers of All Trades*, the shoemaker Ephraem cast his sights beyond one particular *état* to a confraternity of the working class as a whole. Without broader association, he warned, individual "corporations" would "dissipate and dissolve ... annihilate

themselves in the individualism and egoism of isolation." Associations, this remarkable worker went on to write, should instead elect delegates to represent all trades in a coordinating "central committee." When strikes took place, the central committee would collect and disburse funds among strikers.<sup>6</sup>

That practical structure seems to have been about as far as Efrahem was prepared to take his proposed confraternity. But it was one that the most revolutionary Parisian workers came to regard as the alternative structure to industrial capitalism: a central committee of workers' delegates from all trades that would coordinate the funding of collectivist producers' associations and the distribution of their earnings in as egalitarian a manner as possible. In the years to come, they would debate further aspects of this artisanal socialism. Would the earnings in such collectivist cooperatives be shared among the workers in an individual association, or among the members of a trade, or among the working class as a whole? Would they be shared according to work performed (socialism) or according to the needs of the worker and his or her family (communism)? Would producers' cooperatives depend upon the state for start-up credit, or on contributions from the pockets of its members? Would the confraternity of the associations be supervised—temporarily or permanently—by the state (in what later socialist movements might call a "workers' state") or by confederal councils of delegates from the workshops themselves?

In the 1840s, in addition to these expressly associationist forms of socialism, Parisian workers also encountered the highly individualistic, so-called "anarchistic" scheme proposed by Proudhon, which, as we have seen, was based on the personal ownership of property and the use of contracts to knit producers and consumers together. A bitter foe of collectivism of any kind, Proudhon was nonetheless obliged in 1851, in the wake of the associationist ferment of 1848 and after, to acknowledge that association of some sort was unavoidable for large-scale enterprises:

Association has indeed its use in the economy of nations. The workmen's associations are indeed called upon to play an important part in the near future; and are full of hope both as a protest against the wage system, and as an affirmation of reciprocity. This part will consist chiefly in the management of large instruments of labor, and in the carrying out of certain large undertakings, which require at once minute division of functions, together with great united efficiency; and which would be so many schools for the laboring class if association, or better, participation, were introduced. Such undertakings, among others, are railroads.<sup>7</sup>

Proudhon's large-scale associations were to be owned by the men who worked in them, and their components were to be bound together by contracts rather than by ethical or fraternal sentiments.



By 1848, all of these associations—be they trade unions, cooperatives, or producers' associations of a socialistic or communistic type, and their confraternities or confederations—were part of the variegated but passionately held ideology of artisanal socialism: they were to constitute the economic infrastructure of the "democratic and social republic." The most revolutionary militants in Paris adopted a vision of a republic based on the "organization of work," consisting of producers' associations that were socialistic or communistic in nature. The less socially sophisticated workers adopted a vision of a republic that would be managed by associations ranging from mutual aid societies and simple producers' associations to confederations of trade associations.

In general, in the 1830s and 1840s, it was the sophisticated militants who set the tone for working-class demands, and it was Louis Blanc's *Organization of Work*, that synthesized many of these ideas, which became what G.D.H. Cole calls "the rallying cry for the main body of the Paris workers."<sup>8</sup> So nearly did the "organization of labor" into associations acquire quasi-mystical proportions that even republican societies such as the *Droits de l'Homme* called for a republic whose primary task would be to hand over to workers the means by which they could refashion their trades into cooperative associations that they themselves controlled.

By the winter of 1848, the social cauldron of France was already boiling over with the menace of revolution. In January of that year, Alexis de Tocqueville warned his colleagues in the Chamber of Deputies that the revolution they feared was already looming on the horizon:

See what is passing in the breasts of the working classes, who, I grant, are at present quiet. . . . Do you not see that there are gradually forming in their breasts opinions and ideas which are destined not only to upset this or that law, ministry, or even form of government, but society itself, until it totters upon the foundations on which it rests today? Do you not listen to what they say to themselves each day? Do you not hear them repeating unceasingly that all that is above them is incapable and unworthy of governing them; that the present distribution of goods throughout the world is unjust; that property rests on a foundation which is not an equitable foundation? And do you not realize that when such opinions take root, when they spread in an almost universal manner, when they sink deeply into the masses, they are bound to bring with them sooner or later, I know not when nor how, a most formidable revolution?<sup>9</sup>

Nor was Tocqueville wrong in this warning that France was faced with a social as well as a political revolution. Having been robbed of their victory in the 1830 uprising by a clique of constitutional royalists and liberals, French workers were

not eager to mount barricades and spill blood once again for mere changes in government. The majority of veterans of 1830 were determined, as a minimum, to gain the freedom to form associations, which had been prohibited by the Le Chapelier law of 1791, and by the 1834 Law of Associations. Their demand seemed to threaten in the minds of the bourgeoisie a sweeping social revolution against property and wealth as such. Moreover, workers were listening more intently to the ideas that the militants proffered in working-class cafés and sifted them through with greater care, while reading and discussing works by Blanc, Cabet, and Proudhon, as well as lesser-known socialists. It was their debates that Tocqueville urged the Chamber to heed when he rose to address it, barely a month before Paris exploded in the February Revolution of 1848.

## PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION

Nevertheless, despite the debates among Parisian workers about social change, it is doubtful that socialistic ideas alone would have sufficed to plunge Paris into insurrection. In February 1848 what certainly primed the people of the capital for a new revolutionary upheaval was the prolonged economic crisis that had begun two years before. Reaching serious proportions between 1846 and 1848, it significantly threatened the well-being not only of the working classes but of the middle classes, especially the multitude of small shopkeepers who formed an integral part of the mass movements in the cities. The depression began with agricultural shortages, such as had been so common during the *ancien régime*—namely, a potato blight in 1845, followed by a bad wheat harvest in 1846—inciting food and tax riots. It soon extended to commerce, finance, and industry, producing major social instability among ordinarily moderate sectors of French society. Unemployment soared among the working class, seriously affecting the well-being of the petty bourgeoisie as well. As Mark Traugott notes:

the crisis was more severe in Paris than in France as a whole. The annual total of bankruptcies in the capital rose from 691 in 1845 to 931 in 1846 and 1,139 in 1847. A disproportionate share of these failures occurred in small businesses.<sup>10</sup>

In the absence of work, the artisans and the poor suffered enormously, as can be judged by the fact that petty thefts in Paris rose "by more than 60 percent and arrests for begging nearly doubled."<sup>11</sup> During the winter of 1846-47 about a third of the capital's million residents were obliged to rely on some form of charity to maintain themselves, while the number of children



abandoned by their parents soared. By far the greater number of conscripts for the army had to be rejected because they were too undernourished and physically unfit to be suitable as soldiers. Astonishingly, the ministry did little to alleviate the human suffering; as a result, when the crisis abated at the end of 1847, it not only left thousands of paupers in its wake but, among ordinary Parisians, an ominous mistrust of the regime.

Adding to these dissatisfactions were the restrictive policies of the July Monarchy itself. Indeed, the most pressing issue that the government faced in the Chamber was the demand for extending the suffrage. The Legitimists deputies, who considered Louis-Philippe a usurper, tried to embarrass his regime and attempted to curry public favor by calling for nothing less than universal suffrage. No one in the Chamber took this spiteful demand seriously except for the most radical republican deputies, whose number, because of the suffrage restrictions, was insignificant. But the numerically much larger Orleanist Center—the so-called “dynastic opposition,” those who, like Odilon Barrot, were loyal to Louis-Philippe although not to his minister, Guizot—advocated broadening the electorate to include talented and educated as well as wealthy men, in the hope of widening the electoral base for the monarchy among a politically reliable sector of the population. Finally, in March 1847, Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, a protégé of Thiers and a constitutional monarchist, presented a reform proposal that would have added 200,000 “men of talent” to the electoral rolls. So well received was this proposal that it even gained the enthusiastic support of Barrot, the leader of the dynastic opposition, as well as other deputies.

Increasing the urgency of these demands, François Guizot, a conservative Calvinist, had for some eight years been presiding over the government of Louis-Philippe, creating an impressive record of reactionary obduracy and public distrust. With mindless provocation, the minister consistently opposed all the suffrage proposals, with the result that virtually the entire Chamber galvanized against him. Collectively, the opposition deputies and their extraparlimentary supporters resolved to remove him from his position and demand a broadened franchise.

The proponents of electoral reform resolved to take their concerns to the people of France, to gain a base of popular support for their goals. But inasmuch as it was illegal to hold large-scale political assemblies without the permission of the authorities, they devised a stratagem to skirt the law. Starting in June 1847, they organized and conducted a series of public banquets, whose purpose was ostensibly apolitical, to promote civic fraternity, but during the lengthy “toasts” participants in the banquets freely used the occasion to air their grievances and even excoriate the government policies on suffrage and other questions. At least fifty such banquets were held throughout France in the second half of 1847, stirring up public sentiment in favor of limited electoral

reform. Although largely attended by the middle class—the price of admission, six francs, excluded the poor—the sullen and desperate workers, suffering bitterly from the economic crisis, closely followed reports of the speeches in their cafés and in the press.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the banquet campaign, the government adamantly resisted demands for reform. As if to fan the flames stirred up by the banquet movement, Guizot, who composed the king's customary addresses to the legislature, added an incendiary passage to Louis-Philippe's otherwise innocuous speech to the Chamber of December 28, 1847:

In the midst of the agitation fermented by blind or hostile passions one conviction animates and sustains me, that we possess in the constitutional monarchy, in the union of the great powers of the State, the sure means of surmounting these obstacles and of satisfying all the moral and material interests of our dear country.<sup>12</sup>

Guizot could have conveyed the same message—notably, that the government would countenance no reforms—without openly insulting the opposition deputies. But his reference to "blind or hostile passions" induced by "agitation" not only affronted the opposition deputies but was entirely gratuitous. Neither the Legitimists, nor the liberals, nor the dynastic opposition—all the alleged bearers of these "passions"—had the least intention of challenging the constitutional monarchy, nor, for that matter, were most of them trying to unseat Louis-Philippe as king. However much they wanted the franchise extended, deputies such as Thiers and Barrot were equally fearful of instability, which might well have given the surly working classes the opportunity to impose themselves on the political scene. In fact, the greater part of the Chamber's hostility was directed against Guizot, not against Louis-Philippe, who remained in their eyes a tolerable monarch.

Ironically, it was precisely in the month that the speech was made—December 1847—that a banquet was planned for Paris for February 20 of the following year. This banquet was intended to be somewhat different from the others: in the first place, it was organized not by the opposition deputies but by officers from the twelfth legion of the National Guard, the legion recruited from the twelfth Parisian *arrondissement*, which included the working-class neighborhoods of Saint-Victor and Saint-Marcel. And not only was the planned banquet to be held in this volatile neighborhood, but it was to occur on a Sunday, a day of rest, precisely to enable working people to attend. The price of admission, moreover, was set at a mere three francs, a sum that was within the means of many craftsmen. Finally, the banquet was to be preceded by a (hopefully) dignified demonstration winding through the streets of Paris. Almost provocatively, the organizers planned for unarmed but fully uniformed



National Guards—most of whom, to be sure, were shopkeepers and members of the lower middle classes—to maintain order during the occasion.

Needless to say, when permission for this dangerous banquet was requested, the authorities flatly refused to grant it. The city had already seen "hunger demonstrations" by the poor, portending trouble and possibly uprisings. Despite this rejection, the organizers proceeded with their plans to hold the banquet, even if it was to be done illegally. The royal administration was by no means alone in its unease about having a banquet in a working-class neighborhood: the opposition deputies, fearful that the banquet would air radical views, themselves intervened to sidetrack the plan by persuading the twelfth-*arrondissement* organizers to allow a new organizing committee to be formed.

Conveniently for the deputies and the royal administration, the new committee contained a majority of more respectable members, who succeeded in shifting the venue of the demonstration and banquet to the middle-class Champs-Élysées district. Moreover, the price of admission was raised from three to six francs, and the date of the affair was rescheduled for Tuesday, February 22, a work day, which—together with the higher admission price—would hopefully keep working people from attending. A government official was to be stationed at the opening of the banquet tent to advise the banqueters that they were engaging in an illegal action. Despite these significant changes in the plan, however, the government, fearing that danger still lurked, proceeded to strengthen the Paris garrison by 50,000 troops.

Had the demonstration and banquet been publicized merely as the tepid, informal protest that the opposition intended, the entire charade might have succeeded. But Armand Marrast, a moderate but erratic republican who edited the widely read opposition newspaper *Le National*, decided to publish the details of the next day's demonstration in his February 21 issue, and in a way that made it seem like a veritable battle plan. Indeed, to the readers of *Le National*, the plan must have seemed more like orders for a *journée* than a call for a mild protest. Peremptorily, Marrast spelled out every feature of the demonstration in detail: its assembly point (the Place de la Madeleine), its line of march to the Champs-Élysées, the order of the procession, and even the exact positions to be taken by units of the National Guard. The plan was published not only in Marrast's own paper but in *La Reforme*, the most radical of the republican periodicals, and even in the Fourierist *La Démocratie pacifique*.

Marrast almost certainly acted on his own initiative, apparently with the support of his fellow republican journalists, but without consultation with the opposition deputies. The banquet program, according to de Tocqueville,

was resolved upon, drawn up and published without the participation or the knowledge of the members of Parliament who considered themselves to be

sull leading the movement which they had called into existence. The programme was the hurried work of a nocturnal gathering of journalists and Radicals, and the leaders of the Dynastic Opposition heard of it at the same time as the public, by reading it in the papers in the morning ... M. Odilon Barrot, who disapproved of the programme as much as anyone, dared not disclaim it for fear of offending the men who, till then, had seemed to be moving with him.<sup>13</sup>

The fat was now in the fire. Marrast's battle plan, wittingly or not, had provocatively transformed the affair from a domesticated demonstration into a confrontation with the regime, indeed a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the government. To the ministry, it must have sounded like an ultimatum. Moreover, by summoning the National Guard, an authority that the government regarded as its own exclusive prerogative, the banquet committee had ostentatiously preempted the state's own police powers.

The government reacted accordingly—and with characteristic stupidity. On the afternoon of Monday, February 21, the ministry forbade the banquet by suspending all public meetings in Paris. The police chief of the capital declared that if a demonstration took place the next day as planned, it would be viewed as an effort to create an illegal governmental power, which amounted to declaring a state of siege. That evening, the unnerved opposition deputies met fearfully in Barrot's home and voted unanimously to submit to the ban by calling off the entire affair.

But by now the plans for the next day were no longer in their hands: their immediate and abject surrender utterly disappointed, among others, the many students who had their hearts set on the banquet and were resolved to hold a demonstration the next day regardless of the consequences. The many republican and socialistic groups that were intent not only on dislodging Guizot but on toppling the monarchy were no less disgusted; indeed, that evening, as the socialist Marc Caussidière recalls,

Committees of insurrection sat constantly in the secret societies, and in the offices of the Republican journals. We are ignorant of what passed there. They were probably rather engaged in observation than in action. The limited power of the conspirator, who has but scanty numbers at his disposal, only possesses influence as it ministers to a sentiment generally entertained, or a pre-existing passion.

In reality, the aggrieved sentiment upon which activists depended was present among ordinary people as well. In the editorial offices of *La Réforme* a hundred people anxiously gathered to discuss what was in the offing when daylight broke, and as Caussidière puts it, each man resolved to



betake himself separately, and with his hands in his pockets, to the Place de la Madeleine, to watch the course of events, and to gain over public opinion against royalty. In case of an outbreak, each member was to repair immediately to the office of *La Réforme*, to organize the movement with vigour, and to give it a Republican character.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its military precautions, the government radically underestimated the consequences of the ban. In an eerie reprise of Charles's nonchalance some eighteen years earlier, Louis-Philippe, peering out the windows of the Tuileries on the cold, rainswept streets of the capital, nonchalantly remarked that Parisians never made revolutions in the wintertime, taking comfort in the hope that the calendar would assure his safety.

On February 22 the banquet did not, in fact, take place. Most workers took the day off to walk through the streets, sometimes gathering in small crowds to discuss the events of the previous week. In some areas, barricades were actually built, but no republican luminaries led these efforts; indeed, one of the most strikingly consistent features among the eyewitness accounts was the absence of any prominent leader among the radicals. Blanqui, most notably, was still in semibanishment in Blois, some distance from the main theater of events. Other stories have it that, during the night, secret societies gathered to plot insurrectionary acts, but there is no substantial evidence that they were quite as active as police agents claim or that they played a leading role in the events.

Actually, during the morning, a large crowd of students assembled in protest at the Place du Panthéon, on the Left Bank, infuriated mainly because three popular teachers—the historians Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet and the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz—had been banned from lecturing. After a while the students set out for the Palais Bourbon, where the Chamber of Deputies normally convened, on a route that passed through the working-class districts across the Seine. Singing the "Marseillaise" and "Mourir de la Patrie" (a Girondin chorus from a popular play by Dumas) and shouting "Down with Guizot!" and "Long live reform!" they were joined by workers, forming a huge crowd that made its way through the streets to the Chamber of Deputies. When they arrived at the Palais Bourbon, a small group tried, unsuccessfully, to invade the building, but that morning it was empty. A serious assault was made on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, but also without success.

That afternoon, almost inexplicably, a frenzy of spontaneous barricade building swept over the city, inducing the government to send troops out to occupy key positions and buildings to abort any incipient uprising. At the Palais Bourbon a unit of dragoons advanced with drawn swords against a crowd. But before they reached the people, they abruptly halted and, probably on the orders of their officers, sheathed their weapons, to the ecstatic cheers of the people. It would not have required a very perceptive observer to see in this

behavior by the king's most reliable forces a portent of his downfall. Although the troops did capture one barricade, at dusk the fighting, such as it was, seemed to subside, and the government, confident that it was in control of the city, ordered the soldiers to return to their barracks. Yet whatever Louis-Philippe might suppose Parisians did during the winter, his regime, so thoroughly despised after nearly two decades of misrule and demagoguery, was now on the verge of an insurrection that would shake the foundations of the established order in all of Europe.

## THE BARRICADES OF FEBRUARY

The next day, Wednesday, February 23, a deep sense of expectation still pervaded Paris, since the previous day had seen neither the banquet nor a major protest. Shops remained closed and shuttered; the streets were empty; and the Comédie-Française bolted its doors—a sure sign that trouble was afoot. The journalists of *La Réforme* kept their “hands in their pockets,” meaning that they were scattered through the city, more as observers than participants. The clubs of the Right were rife with ominous fears of impending massacres and “communist” conspiracies—a “red specter” that was becoming a highly fashionable object of fear among the upper classes. Generally, deputies of all factions sought the safety of their homes or the Palais Bourbon, which was well guarded by troops and artillery.

But even more barricades now began to appear—in all, more than 1500 were erected throughout Paris, some of which reached stupendous heights in the main boulevards and squares. Priscilla Robertson's account of these traditional barriers is too colorful not to quote at length:

Enthusiastic Paris citizens had used barricades ever since 1588 (against the Duke of Guise) and now they went methodically to work with crowbars to dig up the foot-square paving stones. They politely stopped omnibuses, untied the horses, assisted the passengers to alight, and turned the vehicles over to be weighted down with stones. They tore iron railings from houses, cut down four thousand trees along the boulevards and destroyed nearly as many lampposts, so that afterward the streets looked as if they had been swept by a tornado. Between the barricades men crouched around huge fires casting lead balls [for muskets]. All over town, houses had been ransacked for arms, and chalked on doors one could read, “Arms Given Up”—some added, “With Pleasure.” Through the incessant tocsin, the *Marseillaise* sounded everywhere, or *Mourir pour la Patrie*.<sup>15</sup>



The vast heaps of pavés, vehicles, furniture, trees, and lampposts with which the insurgents blocked entire boulevards far surpassed in size all previous barricades. Lithographs of the time show barricades as tall as multistoried buildings, generally surmounted by a tricolor and armed citizens clutching muskets over their heads.

During the morning the government, mindful that there might be disturbances in the capital, called out its forces to occupy strategic places such as the Place de la Concorde, the Hôtel de Ville, the Porte de Saint-Denis, and the Porte Saint-Martin—traditional trouble spots in times of unrest. Drummers were ordered to different parts of the city to beat out the *rappel*, to summon to arms the National Guard from the various *arrondissements*. The National Guard was a force in which the government felt it could have confidence: it had been revived for the express purpose of protecting and defending the July Monarchy. The Guards had been "the chosen, especially created instrument of bourgeois ascendancy and defence," as John Plamenatz puts it.<sup>16</sup> Every citizen between the ages of twenty and sixty who paid a property tax, however modest, was required to enroll in this legendary citizens' militia. Inasmuch as a Guard was required to buy his own uniform and, if he wished to be in the cavalry, supply his own horse, most Guards were necessarily of bourgeois origin, in order to be able to cover these expenses. Notwithstanding the costs of belonging to the Guard, however, its members included a sizable number of shopkeepers, professionals, and other members of the lower middle class.

Ironically, however, for want of paying the 200-franc *cens*, many of the Guards were denied the franchise under the very monarchy they were expected to defend, and except for the elite units of well-to-do members, they would have benefited from the electoral reform proposed by the Chamber opposition. Hence any plan to quell disturbances that relied on their support rested on very questionable foundations. In fact, when the *rappel* summoned the Guards on the morning of February 23, only a few units responded. The Cavalry Legion, whose members were relatively wealthy, answered the call, and so did a mere three of the twelve infantry units, but the remaining units mustered on their own, hostile to the purpose for which the government now sought to use them.

In the Chamber, meanwhile, the dynastic opposition, to the catcalls of the conservative majority, was demanding the resignation of Guizot and the enactment of moderate electoral reform. Louis-Philippe now realized that he had to heed the cry of "Down with Guizot!" if the dynasty was to survive. On Wednesday afternoon the sovereign, tears freely flowing down his cheeks, informed a sullen Guizot that he and his ministry were dismissed. This concession to popular pressure appalled—and thoroughly alienated—the conservative deputies, who had wrongly decided that the uprising could easily be put down by the military.

The news that Guizot had been forced to resign, however, brought plaudits from the liberal leaders. They were quite prepared to live with the monarchy, which, having fulfilled the wishes of the middle classes, seemed to distance them further from giving support to any uprising. But the news was greeted with joy by the working classes, bringing crowds into the streets, jubilant at the demise of the hated minister. In fact, Paris was enraptured by a spirit of *fraternité*, as people of different classes embraced each other in the streets, while the National Guard fraternized with the population. It seemed that a new dawn was breaking upon the country, and many found reason to hope that the republic for which they had longed was not far off, even though the king still occupied the throne; indeed, if Guizot could fall, then perhaps the "democratic and social republic" itself was on the horizon.

But this festive atmosphere did not last long. Around nine-thirty in the evening, according to the Countess d'Agoult, an acute eyewitness, a joyous "long column, waving torches and a red flag, appeared on the heights of the rue Montmartre."<sup>17</sup> Almost certainly a working-class column, accompanied by enthusiastic children, it had come from the plebeian Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The column was soon joined by popular processions coming from other directions. The merged crowds stopped outside the offices of the republican *National*, where they were greeted by Armand Marrast, the paper's editor, who "by turns delighted as a wit and hurled in thunder the sarcasms and the indignation of the republican opposition"<sup>18</sup>—but also lauded the pacific nature of the *journée*. Then they continued on their way, reinforced by still more demonstrators, until they arrived before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the Boulevard des Capucines. There they encountered a guard consisting of some 200 men of the fourteenth regiment of the line.

The commander of the guard, one Lieutenant-Colonel Courant, was apparently panicked by so large a crowd and ordered his troops to form a firing square, which thoroughly astonished the festive merry-makers. Worse still, as the restless people were pressed forward against the troops by their own numbers, an order was given for the soldiers to fix bayonets. Suddenly an unforeseeable event occurred that transformed the demand for Guizot's removal into a demand for the removal of the monarchy. The Countess d'Agoult tells us what happened:

Amidst the movements occasioned by the execution of this order, a shot went off; a soldier was hit. Instantly, without any preliminary summons, without any drum roll, without anyone later being able to recall having heard the command, ... a volley of murderous firing hit the mass of the people.

It was unclear whether the first shot was an accident or a deliberate provocation by one side or the other; most likely it was an accident. But whatever the cause,



it was enough to make the soldiers feel themselves under attack. No one had given the order for their volley. When the cloud of smoke cleared,

it revealed a spectacle whose horror nothing can convey. A hundred men were lying on the pavement; some were dead, others mortally wounded; a great number had been knocked over by the commotion; several had been thrust face-down in an instinctive flight for safety. Blood flowed in torrents. The groaning of the wounded, the choked murmurings of those who were trying to move away from the melee of the dead and dying, tore at the heart of the soldier who was the innocent author of this massacre, who watched it with eyes of dismay.<sup>19</sup>

Fifty-two were killed, and the wounded were not even counted. News that the soldiers had fired on the people spread like wildfire. Blame was instantly placed on the ministry—and on the king himself, the very sovereign who had come to power as a result of the people's uprising in 1830. Numb with horror and disbelief, working people collected the bodies of the dead, piled them onto wagons, and paraded them through the streets of the capital, to display the results of the government's brutality to everyone. D'Agoult tells us that "a worker in bare arms"—*aux bras nus*—led a white horse by the bridle, pulling a wagon, atop which

five corpses are arranged in a horrible symmetry. Standing on the shaft [of the wagon] a child of the people—of pallid complexion, his eyes ardent and staring fixedly, his arms extended, almost immobile, as one might portray the spirit of vengeance—is illuminating with the reddish glow of his torch, the body of a young woman whose neck and bruised chest have been stained by a long trail of blood. From time to time another worker, at the rear of the wagon, embraces the inanimate corpse with his muscular arms, lifting it. From his shaking torch escape sparks, and he exclaims, as they make their way through the crowd, "Vengeance! Vengeance! They are slaughtering the people!" The crowd responds, "To arms!" and the corpse falls back to the bottom of the wagon, which continues on, followed by silence.<sup>20</sup>

Such scenes were probably repeated throughout the city as wagons passed from neighborhood to neighborhood. In the working-class neighborhoods, armed men appeared at the doors of homes, summoning the residents to vengeance, and joined by members of the lower middle classes, thereby forming the key alliance between the workers and the lower petty bourgeoisie that turned the uprising into a popular movement. "Soon the dry noises of pick axes could be heard on the pavements," d'Agoult tells us, "and the heavy felling of trees on the boulevard."<sup>21</sup> The people were pulling up pavés, erecting more

barricades, and sounding the tocsin. The peaceful *journée* of February 22 had become the February Revolution.

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE MONARCHY

With the massacre on the Boulevard des Capuchins, the very fate of the monarchy hung in the balance. Oblivious to the seriousness of the situation, however, that Wednesday Louis-Philippe was still making ministerial changes: having dismissed Guizot, he was searching for a minister to replace him. His first choice was a vacuous and reactionary Empire courtier, Count Molé, who around midnight refused the offer, mindful that no conservative could handle the situation that was exploding in the streets. A few hours later, in desperation, Louis-Philippe turned to Thiers, the indubitable leader of the dynastic opposition, whose appointment, the king hoped, would conciliate the people. He seems not to have considered that Thiers himself was despised by the masses for his willingness to suppress insurrections. (Thiers had been primarily to blame for perpetrating an infamous massacre at the Rue Transnonain in 1834.) Before he would agree to form a ministry for Louis-Philippe, Thiers laid down a number of demands for reform, among which was that his fellow opposition leader Odilon Barrot be brought into the government. Despite his distaste for Barrot, the king finally had no alternative but to yield, whereupon Thiers became the last minister of the July Monarchy.

Meanwhile, the troops of the line as well as the National Guards who were ordered to occupy strategic parts of the city were becoming uneasy; they were not eager to crush a resolute and vociferous public insurgency. Although some accounts put their number at 50,000, Alphonse de Lamartine, the poet who later became head of government, held that there were no more than 25,000. Whatever their number may have been, the troops of Louis-Philippe, like those that Charles X had sent out to quell the July 1830 uprising, were hungry, fatigued, and demoralized from having huddled in the February cold for forty-eight hours—and they were deeply torn by doubts about their purpose.

Late Wednesday evening the king was informed of the massacre and the escalating insurrectionary situation in the streets. The reports coming into the Tuileries now seemed to justify decisive military action by the monarchy against its citizens. Early on the morning of February 24, the king placed all the city's military forces under the command of the ruthless Marshal Thomas Bugeaud, who was also loathed by the people for his leading role in suppressing the 1834 Parisian riots. Accordingly, in the early hours of Thursday morning, at one-thirty a.m., Marshal Bugeaud held a council of war at the Tuileries in which he



laid out a plan to sweep the capital clean of all insurgents. Four columns of line troops, artillery, and Municipal Guards were ordered, within hours, to leave their barracks and try to cut through the barricades, taking the sleeping insurgents by surprise. Setting out at five in the morning, the first column, under the command of General Sébastiani, was to make its way past the Hôtel de Ville, eliminating any obstacles in the main streets and occupying the area around the Bank of France. At the same time, a second column, led by General Bedeau, was to march through the Grands Boulevards and the Bourse to the Bastille area. Both columns, in turn, were expected to provide cover for a third column that was to clear away any barricades that might be raised again in the aftermath of their passage, while a fourth was dispatched to occupy the strategic Panthéon area.

Allowing for minor losses, all the columns reached their destinations except for Bedeau's, which was stopped short by a large and well-defended barricade that stretched across the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, not far from the Bank of France. To avoid bloodshed, the general entered into parley with the insurgents, with the aid of an intermediary National Guard officer, one Fauvelle-Delabarre, a local businessman who had gone over to the insurgents. But Bedeau could think of no better argument to persuade the insurgents of the government's good intentions than to tell them that Barrot had ascended to power.

Fauvelle-Delabarre shrewdly got the two sides to agree to a delay, so that he could go to the Tuileries and seek a compromise with Marshal Bugeaud. When the wily merchant met with the marshal, however, he got more than he bargained for: Bugeaud wearily consented to withdraw his column entirely. In the meantime, most of the waning troops, already demoralized and listless, began to go over to the insurgents, while others handed over their weapons and withdrew to the Tuileries. The king, having agreed to Thiers's condition to recall the troops, ordered all the columns that had been sent out that morning to return to their barracks. Eventually the entire army was obliged to withdraw from Paris. The capital was placed in the hands of the National Guard, which by now openly supported the insurrection.

The February Revolution was far from bloodless. Serious fighting occurred between workers and Municipal Guards (a militarized police force that should not be confused with the citizen National Guard) at the Château d'Eau and the Palais-Royal. Both conflicts ended with a victory for the insurgents. Demonstrators fought Municipal Guards before the Hôtel de Ville, while General Sébastiani merely stood by and watched; at around eleven a.m., the city hall was taken over effortlessly by a National Guard officer and a small group of students, whereupon General Sébastiani and his column returned to their barracks. For all practical purposes, Paris had fallen to the insurgents without any serious resistance from the government. The main problem the insurgents now faced was the capture of the monarch and his remaining followers.

Louis-Philippe, ensconced in the Tuileries, could hear firing muskets steadily approaching the palace, the scene of so many memorable civil conflicts. Surrounded by despairing ministers, courtiers, and princes of the blood, he took one last step to save his crown. At eleven o'clock in the morning on Thursday, February 24, bedecked in a general's uniform and accompanied by his two sons and a small retinue, he decided to review the troops and National Guards that were lined up in the square outside the palace. Initially, the troops greeted the king with supportive cheers. But amid cries of "Long live the king!" one rebellious contingent of National Guards thrust itself before the sovereign with cries of "Long live reform!" and "Down with the system!"—even brandishing their weapons in the monarch's face. Instantly the discouraged king veered his horse back toward the palace and disappeared into its interior. The collapse of the monarchy was now complete.

Before the day was out, Louis-Philippe, his family, and his retinue had left Paris for England, and never again did any member of the Bourbon or Orleans dynasty occupy a throne in France. The barricades had prevailed and the nation would soon declare itself a republic. But what kind of republic would it be—a conventional, formal republic, or the "democratic and social republic" for which the artisans longed? The remaining months of the 1848 revolution saw an intensifying and finally explosive conflict over this issue, between the working classes of Paris and the upper classes who tried to contain them.

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## NOTES

1. David H. Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France: 1840-47* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 13.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

3. Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 32.

4. Quoted in William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 210.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212.

7. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Beverley Robinson (1923; London: Pluto Press, 1989), p. 98.

8. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 1: *The Forerunners, 1789-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 168.

9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 14.

10. Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 11.



11. *Ibid.*

12. Quoted in Arnold White, *Men in Crisis: The Revolutions of 1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 28.

13. Tocqueville, *Revolutions*, pp. 30-1.

14. Louis Marc Caussidière, *Mémoires* (London, 1848), in *1848 in France*, ed. Roger Price, Documents of Revolution series (London: Thames & Hudson; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 54-5.

15. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 35.

16. John Plamenatz, *The Revolutionary Movement in France, 1815-71* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), p. 64.

17. Daniel Stern (pseud. for the Countess d'Agoult), *Histoire de la révolution de 1848* (Paris: Gustave Sandre, 1850), vol. 1, p. 135. The appearance of this red flag was in "formal contravention of the orders given by the office of the *Réforme* and in other centers," which had explicitly prohibited the "hoisting of any flag other than the tricolor, and against uttering any cry other than 'Vive la réforme!'" If D'Agoult's account is accurate, the self-appointed leaders of the *journées* were trying to confine the masses to strictly legislative demands, rather than demands to alter the structure of the government. Lamartine agrees with her that a red flag was present; see Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871), p. 56.

18. Lamartine, *French Revolution of 1848*, p. 54.

19. Stern, *Histoire de la révolution*, pp. 137-8.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

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## CHAPTER 26 The Incomplete Revolution

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The conflict over what kind of republic would follow the monarchy began almost at the very moment the king fled Paris. Some insurgents, to be sure, were content to occupy the Tuileries and caricature the nobility by sitting at Louis-Philippe's vacated dining table and playfully addressing one another as "duke" and "marquis." But thousands of others, armed with muskets, bayonets, pikes, and swords, raced to the Palais Bourbon, where the panicked Chamber of Deputies was in session, and to the Hôtel de Ville, where Paris traditionally established its revolutionary governments. The city's main streets and boulevards were clogged with people joyously shouting huzzahs, singing the "Marseillaise," and calling for a republic. They waved red flags as well as the tricolor—symbolic portents of the differences that were soon to divide the capital between supporters of a conventional middle-class republic and those of a "democratic and social republic."

### THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

For guidance, those insurgents who sought political direction in forming a new government turned to the editors of the two major republican newspapers. The more middle-class elements clustered around *Le National*, whose editor was the moderate but anti-socialist republican Armand Marrast; the workers gravitated toward the offices of *La Réforme*, whose editor, Ferdinand Flocon, exhibited more radical republican tendencies. The two periodicals had been bitter rivals before the uprising, but now the need to arrive at a common list of republicans who would make up a provisional government was imperative. According to Blanc, the job of negotiating such a list was undertaken by himself, representing *La Réforme*, and by one M. Martin of Strasbourg, for *Le National*.

The two men arrived at a mutually agreeable list that both newspapers found



acceptable, and scarcely before the fighting had come to an end on February 24, Blanc read it out to the huge crowd gathered before the office of *La Réforme*. The list included several longstanding republicans, as one might expect, including the venerable Jacques Dupont de l'Eure, who had been politically active in the Directory during the closing years of the Great Revolution; François Arago, whose principal credential was his reputation as an outstanding astronomer; Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, generally regarded as a radical republican; Louis Blanc, the socialist; and Marrast and Flocon, who represented the constituencies of their respective newspapers.

But the list also contained many erstwhile constitutional monarchists who had suddenly undergone a conversion to republicanism in the last day or two. Alphonse de Lamartine, a poet and aristocrat, had been a monarchist sympathizer until the evening of February 24 and perhaps later, but his name was placed on the list, as were the names of Alexandre Thomas Marie, a lawyer and opposition deputy whose conversion to moderate republicanism was as newborn and tenuous as Lamartine's; Adolphe Crémieux, a deputy who had initially supported a monarchical regency to replace Louis-Philippe; Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, another opposition deputy, whose dubious republicanism represented the interests of the well-to-do middle classes. Garnier-Pagès, in fact, had no sympathy for radical republicans, and whatever prestige he had among working people came from the reflected glory of his late brother, who had been an ardent republican leader.

Massive crowds gathered beneath the windows of the *Réforme* offices, Blanc recounts, and the names of the proposed government members were read out for their approval. Although the names of Blanc and Flocon pleased the crowd, they were disinclined to accept a government made up of so many former monarchists and moderate republicans. They recalled only too vividly how just such moderates had stolen their uprising of 1830, and they considered it a matter of the utmost urgency that the same thing should not be permitted to happen again. A cry went up to add the name of Albert, the *nom de guerre* of Alexandre Martin, a buttonmaker who was highly regarded by the Parisian workers for his revolutionary views and activities. A well-known socialist, he had close ties to the secret societies. With a worker like him sitting in the government, the crowd assumed, no measure detrimental to the interests of working people would go unchallenged. And when a rumor spread that over at the Palais Bourbon, the Chamber of Deputies was preparing to accept the regency of the Duchess of Orleans and her young son, the Count of Paris, the crowd flew into a rage and headed over to the palace to put an end to this prospect.

The rumor was more than justified. At the Palais Bourbon the Orleanists and the old dynastic opposition were still hoping that the old king could be replaced by a regency of the duchess and the count. It was during the debate over this regency that the insurgent crowd burst into the Chamber. Weapons in

hand, they provocatively aimed some of them at the speaker's rostrum. As Tocqueville tells us:

Loud blows were heard at the door of one of [the galleries,] and yielding to the strain, the door burst into atoms. In a moment the gallery was invaded by an armed mob of men, who noisily filled it and soon afterwards all the others. A man of the lower orders, placing one foot on the cornice, pointed his gun at the President and the speaker, others seemed to level theirs at the assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Amid the melee, the duchess and her son extricated themselves from the scene as quickly as they could, followed by deputies of the Right and many moderate factions, leaving the chamber half empty. Almost all the remaining legislators were unnerved and tried to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The president of the Chamber, after trying in vain to formally close the session, simply handed over the palace to the crowd, which reconstituted itself as a popular legislature irrespective of any legalities.

Partly at the prompting of Tocqueville, the poet Lamartine had taken the speaker's rostrum. Lamartine had initially favored the duchess's bid for the throne, but ever pliable and adaptable, the elegant aristocrat was nothing if not a careerist. A former monarchist, this political flirt now exuded a spirit of *fraternité*—draping himself in the tricolor and applauding the republic, at a time when its ascendancy was clearly irresistible.

Tocqueville, who had momentarily left the Chamber to see to the safety of the duchess, returned to find that "confusion was at its height." Lamartine was conversing with the crowd around him rather than orating, and several speakers were trying to make their points all at once, so that "there seemed to be almost as many orators as listeners." Finally someone, apparently Ledru-Rollin, handed Lamartine the list of names that had been endorsed by the crowd before *Le Réforme* a few hours earlier.<sup>2</sup> "In a moment of semi-silence," recounts Tocqueville, "Lamartine began to read out a list containing the names of people proposed by I don't know whom to take share in the Provisional Government that had just been decreed, nobody knows how."<sup>3</sup> As each name was called, the crowd shouted its approval.

But wiser heads in the Palais Bourbon knew that this endorsement by what remained of the Chamber of Deputies could hardly suffice to consecrate an insurgent government in Paris. Revolutionary protocol required that any new government had to be sworn in at the Hôtel de Ville and only at the Hôtel de Ville. Moreover, in this situation, those who wished to harness the revolution and put it in a conventional middle-class bridle had not a moment to lose: in their absence a more revolutionary regime could establish itself at the Hôtel de Ville at any time. From somewhere in the Palais Bourbon, as Tocqueville



tells us, the cry went up: "To the Hôtel de Ville!" To which "Lamartine echoed, 'Yes, to the Hôtel de Ville,' and went out forthwith, taking half the crowd with him."<sup>4</sup>

Lamartine's own memoirs give us a slightly different account—one that self-flatteringly claims that the wiser head that initiated the departure was his own. Consistently referring to himself in the third person, he writes with impeccable hindsight,

Lamartine had intuitively felt that if this provisional government were installed at the Chamber of Deputies, or at the office of the minister of the interior, it would probably be attacked and annihilated before night. The civil strife which had been extinguished by the proclamation of this government would be rekindled in the evening between two rival administrations. The Hôtel de Ville, the head quarters of the revolution, the Palace of the People, the Mount Aventine of seditions, was occupied by innumerable multitudes of people from the surrounding quarters, and from the armed faubourgs. These masses, directed by the most enterprising and intrepid men, would not fail, on hearing the defeat of royalty, the flight of the regency, and the triumph of the revolution, to name a government for themselves. The sanguinary anarchies and tyrannies of the Commons of Paris under the first republic naturally occurred in the thoughts of Lamartine. He instantly saw them afresh in all their horror, still further augmented by those elements of social strife which the absurd doctrines of communism, socialism, and expropriation were causing to ferment, and would cause to burst forth in these masses of workmen, destitute of food, but possessed of arms.<sup>5</sup>

On the other side of the Seine a new insurrection was indeed brewing in the Place de Grève, the huge square that opened out before the Hôtel de Ville, as well as inside the labyrinthine city hall itself. Huge crowds of armed workers, brandishing muskets, bayonets, pikes, and swords, carrying torches, and waving red flags, had massed in the area, occupying the building and the square and spilling over into the nearby streets, in order to complete their revolution with a government of their own choosing.

Hardly anyone at this "Mount Aventine of seditions" seemed aware that at the Palais Bourbon, "the revolution"—that is, Lamartine and the others on the list, some of whom had been trying to install the duchess as regent only a few hours earlier—had established a provisional government in their absence and without their consent. Moreover, had they known of it, the immense number of insurgents surrounding the sprawling city hall, their clothing spattered with blood and their faces smeared with gunpowder, might well have dispersed the Chamber of Deputies with their weapons. It was the prospect of forming a

social republic, or at least a broader democratic republic, that held the attention of the workers, who seem to have formed the great bulk of the crowd.

Meanwhile, the new members of the Provisional Government, en route from the Chamber to the Hôtel de Ville, had to push and shove their way through this crowd to reach their destination. The diminutive Louis Blanc, a virtual dwarf in stature, actually had to be carried on the shoulders of brawny workers. In fact, setting out as a single group from the Palais Bourbon, they and their escorts soon lost contact with one another and finally arrived in small groups of twos or threes.

Upon their arrival at the city hall a large meeting of insurgents was under way in an assembly chamber known as the Salle Saint-Jean. When the news got out that a provisional government had been selected, the new ministers, as they arrived, were obliged to submit themselves and their principles to the crowd in the Salle for its approval. Garnier-Pagès, Ledru-Rollin, Dupont, Arago, and Lamartine arrived first, whereupon they came before the generally orderly assembly and were pilloried by often argumentative queries. Their responses were written down and passed out through the windows to the crowd in the Place de Grève. The people, both inside the city hall and in the square, constituted a remarkable mass jury, as it were, questioning and disputing with the various would-be ministers and roaring their approval where they agreed.

This mass jury was far from sympathetic to Lamartine, especially since he refused to commit himself to declaring a republic immediately. Shortly before Blanc was borne into the Salle by "muscular workmen," as he calls them, Lamartine had explained his refusal. "Strikingly cautious and involved was his exordium," Blanc notes dryly. Lamartine

said that the question [of declaring France a republic] was one of paramount importance, one which the nation would naturally be called upon to examine, and which he, Lamartine, did not mean to prejudge. These words gave rise to a violent tumult. A tremendous shout of *Vive la République!* shook the walls of the building.

Amid the tumult, one of the militants managed to interrupt Lamartine, warning the poet that he must not "cheat the people of what they had so dearly paid for," if he was to serve as a republican minister. Nimbly Lamartine modified his position, and when he resumed his speech, says Blanc, "he took great care to deviate by degrees from the path he had got into, and he concluded by declaring for the Republican form of Government, whereupon he was warmly applauded."<sup>6</sup> When it came to be Blanc's turn to speak before the insurgents, he called not only for a formal republic but for the abolition of economic as well as juridical injustice. His own speech, Blanc tells us, was greeted with the cry "*Vive la république sociale!*"



Once the first group of government members—Lamartine, Ledru-Rollin, and the others—had been approved, they were led by a sympathetic guide through endless passages in the mazelike Hôtel de Ville to a small chamber in another part of the building. Here they shut the door and convened to assert their authority, posting a group of armed students from the École Polytechnique outside to stand guard. Meanwhile Blanc, Flocon, and Marrast, who had arrived later, were obliged to find their own way to the remote chamber. "It was not without difficulty," Blanc notes, "that we succeeded in finding [the government members] out, through the winding passages of the Hôtel de Ville."<sup>7</sup> The absence of their more radical colleagues had not prevented Lamartine and his clique from proceeding without them, and their arrival was not received cordially. In his memoir Lamartine writes of Blanc's arrival as if he were an alien being who had suddenly intruded. Although the poet greeted them with his characteristically "radiant" expression, to use Blanc's adjective, others glared at them sullenly or even with hostility. They could scarcely bring themselves to accept Blanc, Marrast, Flocon, and Albert (who arrived still later) as part of the government. But then, the new ministers could ignore the radical members only at their peril, as it would have produced a storm in the crowd outside. At the bright suggestion of Garnier-Pagès, the late arrivals were designated as "secretaries," leaving their status in the government ambiguous.\*

Yet even Lamartine leaves no doubt that the legitimacy of the government as a whole was arguable. Lacking any real foundation apart from the sheer effrontery of its members, the Provisional Government, at this point, could have been dispersed by any resolute body of armed men, such as the workers milling around in the square below their window. And before the night was over, the challenges to the new government's authority would come thick, fast, and furious.

The first issue of contention was whether the Provisional Government would declare the republic that the crowd outside was demanding so vehemently, a step that the moderate majority were not eager to take. The thought of a republic still evoked images of the Great Revolution, with its mass mobilization of the poor and dispossessed. There can be little doubt that, fearing the influence of the urban workers, the majority of the ministers wanted rural France, particularly the reactionary peasantry, to decide the question of the governmental form. Accordingly, the ministers offered a tepid statement of intention written by Lamartine, declaring that the government "prefers" a republic, which Blanc altered to say that the government "stands by" a republic.

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\* Albert's name and background gave a plebeian veneer to the Provisional Government. The ministers consistently called him Albert, to the point that he threatened to resign if they continued to address him disdainfully by only a Christian name, as though he were not their social equal.

By now, the delays and equivocations on this crucial question were beginning to anger the masses in the square below. Accordingly, the government finally promulgated its first decree. It proclaimed that the Provisional Government existed "in the name of the French people" and declared that "the government desires a republic, pending ratification by the people, who will be immediately consulted."<sup>8</sup> But a statement of "desire" was not enough. In short order, the popular revolutionary socialist François Raspail "commanded the Provisional Government to proclaim a republic," observes Marx; "if this order of the people were not fulfilled within two hours, he would return at the head of 200,000 men."<sup>9</sup> Blanc was obliged to go out to the Place de Grève and assure the people that "the Provisional Government will[s] the Republic"—which they took to mean that the government had actually proclaimed the republic.

The grim faces I had before me, made still more terrible by the glare of numberless torches, expressed on a sudden a feeling of indescribable satisfaction, and this feeling burst out into a triumphant roar. . . . Some workmen having found in a corner of the Hôtel de Ville a large piece of linen, took a bit of charcoal and traced on it in colossal letters: *La République une et indivisible est proclamée en France*.<sup>10</sup>

The banner was hoisted up to a window in the Hôtel de Ville, where it was illuminated by torches for all those below to see.

Having made this declaration, the Provisional Government parceled out the ministries among its various members. Although most histories of 1848 treat Lamartine as the head of state, officially he was merely the minister of foreign affairs. Nonetheless he was certainly the most conspicuous figure in the new government, even in the eyes of his opponents. The elderly Dupont de l'Eure was made the official president of the ministerial council, his name lending the government an aura of the First Republic, in which he had participated, and an air of republican virtue. Crémieux acquired the ministry of justice, and Marie public works. Arago became minister of the navy, and Ledru-Rollin was made the minister of the interior, while the so-called "secretaries" received no ministerial portfolios at all.

The remaining ministries were allotted to men who had not been on the lists compiled by the two republican newspapers. The banker Michel Goudchaux was made minister of finance (to be replaced a few days later by Garnier-Pagès); Baron Subervie, an Empire general, became minister of war; Eugène Bethmont, a liberal republican lawyer well known for defending left-wing republicans, was given the ministry of agriculture and trade; and the Vicomte de Courtais became the commander of the National Guard. Finally, one Hippolyte Sarnot was granted the ministry of education.



Marrast took over the mayoralty of Paris without further ado. Marc Caussidière, a Jacobin who had been close to Blanqui in the 1830s and then became a journalist for *La Réforme*, simply went to the prefecture and boldly declared himself chief of police, a declaration that aroused no opposition from the tremulous occupants of the police headquarters. He obliged all the officers to swear their allegiance to the republic, warning them that they would be shot if they violated their oath, then issued a proclamation urging the people to retain their arms, since they had been betrayed in the past by those who had ridden to power on their backs. In short order Caussidière created a small army, called the "Montagnards," who were pledged to protect the revolution from its enemies, including potential opportunists in its ranks. Finally, Étienne Arago (brother of the astronomer François) became minister of the post, bringing another *Réforme* journalist into the government.

The Provisional Government now engaged in a marathon night of decree-writing, abolishing monarchical institutions and creating new republican ones. One decree simply eliminated the Chamber of Peers; another guaranteed the freedom of speech and the press, ending the censorship that had vexed so many opposition periodicals, while another established the rights of free assembly and association. Still another "democratized" the National Guard by opening its ranks to all adult males and by providing uniforms for those who could not afford them. As the ministers scrawled out decree after decree, the documents were recopied a hundredfold by hand, then tossed out of the windows to the waiting crowd below. A while later, printing presses were brought to the city hall to publish the decrees, which were then placarded all over Paris. Overnight, the government seemed to become a machine for producing one decree after another. Indeed, more than sixty decrees, by Lamartine's count, were written on that night of February 24.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HÔTEL DE VILLE

In the meantime, during the evening, people continued to stream into the Place de Grève from the neighborhoods and suburbs—according to Lamartine, their numbers soared to about 200,000 men and women in all. By the thousands they flooded into the huge Hôtel de Ville itself, packing its salons, halls, and vestibules. At every turn a different orator, it seemed, exhorted the masses—primarily workers—to assert their rights.

Lamartine aptly calls the Hôtel de Ville on the night of February 24 a "field of battle."<sup>11</sup> Especially to the workers newly arrived from the faubourgs, the earlier rounds of queries and debates in the Salle Saint-Jean had by no means endowed the ministers with the right to function as the chief officers of the

republic. In fact, the new arrivals, red flags fluttering from the points of their bayonets, seemed on the point of expelling the government members from the Hôtel altogether, and perhaps thrashing them in the bargain.

Their most persistent sentiment was the fear that they would be cheated of a revolution they had made at the sacrifice of their own blood and lives. When they learned that the government radicals—Blanc, Flocon, and Albert, men whom they had come to respect during the years of agitation against the monarchy in favor of a "democratic and social republic"—were to serve only as secretaries in the government, while those who had the real power were moderates or even former monarchists, they were outraged and demanded that the title "secretary" be struck from their names on all decrees. Just as surely as Lamartine and his clique feared the demands of the huge crowd in the Place de Grève, so the workers feared the intentions of the small clique that had installed itself as the Provisional Government. And both sides behaved as though they were girding themselves for a confrontation.

Finally, by the sheer thrust of their bodies, some members of the crowd reached the doors of the remote chamber where the new government was meeting. They beat on the doors insistently, demanding that the ministers inside heed their wishes and carry out their demands, repeatedly charging the entryway with muskets and swords in hand. But the new ministers had pushed furniture up against the doors and in the vestibules to keep the crowds out. Somehow, despite the urgency of their demands, the surging crowd was rebuffed—partly by the furniture, but partly too by persuasion, as periodically Lamartine would emerge from the room to soothe them with his rhetoric. Then, to the sounds of muskets firing, the government members returned to work, churning out decrees and signing them, as if each one were a brick in a wall that could safeguard them from the assault of the plebeian crowd. One decree abolished the death penalty for political crimes (apparently the government wished to demonstrate its intention of avoiding a Jacobin terror), and another repealed the Le Chapelier Law, giving the workers the right to form associations and trade unions. Another called for a national Constituent Assembly, to be composed of nine hundred "representatives of the people" endowed with the authority to write a new, presumably republican constitution. Still another proclaimed universal suffrage for all males over twenty-one years of age, the broadest franchise France had ever seen. (Like the call for a Constituent Assembly, this decree was certain to diminish the political influence of the urban workers in favor of the peasantry.)

In the Place de Grève the threats and knock-down fights between workers and supporters of the government continued up to midnight and beyond. Finally, exhausted, the crowds departed from the square, and the entire quarter fell silent. All the clamor, threats, and pushing notwithstanding, the ministers had held their own, and they steadfastly refused to leave the Hôtel de Ville,



rotating their sleeping hours until daybreak, lest it be reclaimed by radical workers.

As morning dawned on February 25, groups of fifteen to twenty men drifted from the working-class quarters back into the Place de Grève, each group carrying a red flag. Armed with muskets and swords, they distributed red strips of cloth to the rest of the people as they arrived, until a large crowd had assembled, flecked with red. When other groups of workers showed up bearing the tricolor, they skirmished, but red triumphed over the tricolor.

The fighting that continued on this day was over the issue of which flag would be adopted as the symbol of the Second Republic. The government, the propertied classes, and the middle classes, as well as the more nationalistic of the workers, wanted to retain the old tricolor, with its overtones of the Great Revolution, the First Republic, and French national pride. To the politically aware minority of workers, however, the tricolor had been sullied by its association with Louis-Philippe's July Monarchy. Instead, they demanded the red flag as the symbol of the "democratic and social republic."

Finally, just when the crowd attacking the Hôtel de Ville to establish the red flag seemed on the point of overcoming his guards, Lamartine emerged to deliver an oration in defense of the tricolor as the symbol of the republic. The red flag, he intoned, was the flag not of France but of "a party," one composed of "Terrorists and Communists." It was the "flag of terror," the flag of blood and strife,<sup>12</sup> and had been "dragged through the mud and blood around the Champ de Mars" (a reference to Lafayette's massacre of 1791). But the tricolor was the accepted national flag of France among nations, having "gone around the world in triumph."<sup>13</sup> Largely as a result of Lamartine's rhetoric, the tricolor finally carried the day as the republican standard, if only because most of the people succumbed to his appeal to national glory. As a concession to the sizable minority of militants who were still unappeased, the government agreed to add a red rosette to the staff of the national flag and require all members of the government to wear one in their buttonholes.

Even now, however, the victory of the tricolor did not seem certain to Lamartine, and to play it safe, he decided he needed a large crowd that would demonstrate its warm enthusiasm for the established national flag. That evening he sent out his young guardians and other students from the École Polytechnique to mobilize support for the government. They, aided by other middle-class elements, fanned out through the capital, calling upon the propertied classes to rally with arms in hand at the Hôtel de Ville the next morning. On the morning of February 26, when workers with red flags reappeared to resume their battle, they found the Place de Grève filled with conventional republicans waving tricolors, not to speak of at least 5000 men surrounding the Hôtel de Ville with bayoneted muskets. As the day wore on, by Lamartine's account, the red flags virtually disappeared in the sea of tricolors.

With or without a red flag as an adornment, the workers' desire for the "democratic and social republic" was very real, and even under the tricolor their hopes persisted. All day on the twenty-fifth they pressured the government to establish the "right to work"—that is, to guarantee employment—and a Ministry of Labor and Progress to look after the workers' interests.

Around noon, the people chose as their spokesman a young workman, a militant named Marche—"the Spartacus of this army of the intelligent poor," Lamartine calls him—to head a delegation to impress their demands upon the ministers. According to Lamartine, Marche entered the government chamber,

a man of twenty or twenty-five years of age, of middle stature, but erect and strong, with limbs firmly knit and strongly moulded; his face, partially blackened with powder, appeared pale with emotion; his lips trembled with anger, and his eyes, sunk under his projecting forehead, darted fire. In his look the electricity of a whole people was concentrated. . . . He waved in his left hand a strip of red ribbon or cloth, and in his right held the barrel of a carbine, the butt-end of which, at every word he spoke, he caused to ring upon the pavement. . . . He spoke not as a man, but as a people, who will be obeyed, and will brook no delay. . . . He repeated, in accents of increasing energy, all the conditions of the manifesto of impossibilities, which the vociferations of the people enjoined it to accept and to realize on the instant—the overthrow of all known social order, the extermination of property, and of capitalists, spoliation, the immediate installation of the destitute in the community of goods, the proscription of bankers, of the rich, the manufacturers, the bourgeois of every condition.<sup>14</sup>

Marche appears to have said no such things; Lamartine's crassly tendentious account is valuable primarily as a reflection of the extreme polarization that existed between the workers of Paris and the privileged classes. Blanc's account of the incident is almost certainly closer to the truth: speaking briefly and firmly, Marche simply

presented himself in the name of the people, pointed with an imperious gesture to the Place de Grève, and making the butt of his musket ring upon the floor, demanded the recognition of the "*Droit du Travail*" [right to work]. . . . I [Blanc] drew [him] aside, and showed him a paper on which, while M. de Lamartine was speaking, I had written the following decree:—"The provisional Government . . . engage themselves to guarantee labor to every citizen."<sup>15</sup>

To this overture, officially establishing the "right to work," Marche replied to Blanc, "The People offers the Republic three months of poverty"—by which he



clearly meant that they would endure three more months of hardship to give the government time to make significant changes. Then, presumably, if their demands were not met, the workers would rise in earnest.<sup>16</sup>

## THE PARADOXES OF 1848

Marche's warning is evidence of an unprecedented turn in France's revolutionary behavior by comparison with earlier uprisings. "How thoroughly things had changed since 1830 was made clear in 1848," observes William H. Sewell, Jr., in his account of the workers' movement in that remarkable year.

Whereas the July revolution of 1830 had caught the workers unaware and incapable of articulating an independent program until it was too late, the February revolution of 1848 immediately provoked a massive class-conscious workers' movement, not only in Paris, but in cities throughout France. From the beginning, the workers of Paris pushed the revolution to the left, forcing the provisional government to proclaim a republic on February 24, to proclaim the "right to labor" and the establishment of National Workshops on February 25, and set up the famous Luxembourg Commission on February 28.<sup>17</sup>

The National Workshops and the Luxembourg Commission will be discussed presently. What is important to note here is that, generally speaking, the French Revolution of 1848 was the most class-oriented civil conflict of the entire nineteenth century. The workers and the propertied classes confronted each other with greater directness and a stronger sense of their social identity and their conflicting interests than was to be the case even in the Paris Commune of 1871, which socialists and anarchists have, for generations, erroneously depicted as a classical proletarian revolution. In contrast to the *sans-culottes* of 1793, who had vaguely thought of themselves as "the people," the workers of 1848 were far more aware of themselves as a social class, distinct from "the people" as a whole. And as a class, they had very specific social and economic demands. Although few of them were actually industrial proletarians, these artisans who formed the majority of the working class in the French capital did not hesitate to call themselves *prolétaires* or, more commonly, *ouvriers* and *travailleurs*, who opposed a distinct class enemy, *les capitalistes* or *la bourgeoisie*.

The militant *ouvriers* of 1848 had two demands of historic proportions: the right to form associations, and the "right to work." The right to form associations, as we have seen, meant the repeal of all laws curtailing or banning associations, including producers' cooperatives, mutual aid societies, and trade

unions. With the repeal of the Le Chapelier Law, the government had granted the first part of this right; it remained to be seen whether it would carry out the second by encouraging the growth of associations. The "right to work" meant that workers who could not find employment in their own trade should be provided with the means of life until such employment was to be acquired. This demand was particularly urgent in 1848, since Paris was filled with unemployed workers who lived from hand to mouth, pawned or sold even their most necessary possessions, stole, prostituted themselves, slept in parks, and huddled against inclement weather in doorways, sewers, and under the bridges of the Seine. And workers who fled local famine conditions in the provinces to seek work in the city often had the appearance of scarecrows. Hunger was pervasive in the working-class districts. One of the ministerial council's most important decrees established the right of the poor to reclaim articles from pawnshops for which they had been paid less than ten francs. But it was manifestly necessary for the Provisional Government to do more and translate the "right to work" into practical reality.

These rights were not simply ordinary demands that might be raised in demonstrations and riots. The workers who raised them, rather, conceived them as inherent natural rights, comparable to the inalienable rights of "liberty, equality, fraternity" demanded by the radicals in the Great Revolution. The workers saw themselves as claiming rights that greatly expanded society's concepts of justice, revealing how far beyond the juridical rights of 1789 their consciousness had advanced. Politically, the militants wanted representation, by universal manhood suffrage, in all organs of government, largely to ensure that the "democratic and social republic" would satisfy their economic demands. However unclear the structure of this republic may have been, they keenly desired that working men with "calloused hands" (as they put it) should occupy many, if not most, of the seats in the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Ville. Despite the large number of radical intellectuals who rallied to their cause and whose support they accepted willingly, they were eager to see trusted *proletaires* in the new government, such as Alexandre Martin (to use Albert's real name), who came out of the workshops and the secret societies.

At the risk of repetition, however, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the Parisian workers of 1848 did not oppose the existence of private property as such. Lamartine's effort to paint them as enemies of "property," not to speak of "society," was knowingly demagogic, intended to curry favor with the bourgeoisie and, later, to justify repressive measures against the working class. Parisian workers themselves were still rooted economically in the preindustrial age, and as artisans, many were small proprietors in their own right. The majority of artisans who worked for master craftsmen generally aspired to establish small workshops of their own, which they could run with or without hired labor.



But the demand for the "right to work" left open the question of what institutional form this inalienable right would take. How would society be organized to give it material reality? Other rights could be given tangibility in relatively obvious and straightforward ways, within the framework of the republic's legal system. Liberty could be institutionalized by passing laws to protect freedoms of the press, speech, and assembly. Equality (of opportunity, not condition) could be embodied in a juridical process that regarded everyone as equal before the law, irrespective of wealth or status. But what would it actually mean to institutionalize the "right to work"?

The theorist whose ideas seemed to answer this question best was Louis Blanc, who advanced a notion of social workshops (as we saw in Chapter 23) that were oriented toward production to meet human needs rather than toward the acquisition of profit, and that would federate in associations of mutual support to create a cooperative society. His *Organization of Work* had been immensely popular, and in the weeks following the February Revolution, militant French workers regarded him as their most outstanding spokesman. It was to Blanc, in fact, that many workers looked for practical direction in creating a cooperative alternative to industrial capitalism and from whom they received a fairly workable scheme.

On February 28, three days after Blanc wrote the "right to work" decree in response to Marche's demand, the Provisional Government established a Government Commission of Labor to develop various projects on behalf of workers and to study the means to provide workers with the fruits of their labor. To gild this Commission with pomp, the government housed it in the distinguished Luxembourg Palace, which had formerly accommodated the Chamber of Peers, ostensibly to convey the impression that the Commission was labor's "upper house," and that the workers had a major institutional place in the new republic.

The Luxembourg Commission, as it came to be known, was essentially an executive committee composed of a number of notable economists, socialist theorists, and publicists, including, among others, the Fourierist Victor Considérant, the economist Charles Dupont-White, and the Saint-Simonian Constantin Pecqueur. In addition to the Labor Commission, Blanc established what he pompously called the Labor Parliament, which was actually an ad hoc Labor Assembly, composed of three delegates from every trade corporation or union. Of the three delegates, one was to function as part of the Labor Commission itself, while the other two would attend the meetings of the Labor Assembly.

On March 1, the first meeting of the Luxembourg Commission drew about 200 deputies (in time they were to number more than 700) from "various trade unions," as Blanc says, to take "places formerly occupied by the peers of France,"<sup>18</sup> an allusion to the Luxembourg Palace. Almost immediately after

opening this first official session, however, Blanc came up against militant workers' demands for an appreciable reduction in the length of the work day and for the abolition of the *marchandage*, a system in which parasitic middlemen, standing between the employers and the workers, distributed jobs to workers in return for a slice of their earnings. Fearful of antagonizing the propertied classes, Blanc says in his memoir, he did not want to act on these two demands right away, "without having previously appealed to the employers for their advice on so delicate a subject."<sup>19</sup> He tried to persuade the workers to drop their demands, an effort, he confesses, that was not "warmly received."

There was a gloomy silence, forerunner of some coming struggle, and indeed, scarcely had a minute elapsed, when a great number of workmen, rising altogether and talking loud, declared that no kind of labor should be resumed until the two demands had been conceded.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, Blanc tried earnestly to get employers to participate as equals in discussions with workers at the Luxembourg Palace. Over the next months he successfully negotiated agreements to end strikes, which had become fairly commonplace in France. Blanc appears to have had virtually no understanding that capitalists and workers were irreconcilable opponents, and he consistently opposed class conflicts as socially harmful. Nevertheless, the Luxembourg Commission, with the Labor Assembly, was the nearest thing to an institutionalized counterpower against the Provisional Government that the Parisian working class had. In William Sewell's judgment the Commission constituted the "focus and organizational center of the workers' movement in 1848."

Although its official function was only advisory, revolutionary workers saw its role in much loftier terms. In the words of the cabinet makers' delegates, its task was nothing less than elaborating "the consultation of labor," and Louis Blanc himself characterized the commission as "the Estates General of the people."<sup>21</sup>

Indeed the Labor Assembly ultimately was able to compel the Provisional Government not only to abolish the *marchandage* but to adopt a ten-hour day for Parisian workers and eleven for those in the provinces. (The Provisional Government, to be sure, resisted these demands, but when the delegates threatened to leave the Labor Assembly en masse—which would have eliminated the Assembly altogether—it submitted.) Moreover, the Commission could celebrate its role in successfully initiating several social workshops, most notably a journeymen tailors' cooperative at the abandoned Clichy prison, which turned out cloaks for the National Guard. But despite much talk about



its function as France's second legislative house, the Luxembourg Commission had none of the power, let alone the resources possessed by the old Chamber of Peers. In the early days of the February Revolution, Blanc had initially proposed the creation of a Ministry of Labor and Progress as part of the government itself, with full authority to carry out the policies it deemed necessary. But the other ministers had found the prospect of Blanc playing a significant role in the government to be intolerable, despite his basically moderate views. Minister of Public Works Marie later celebrated the fact that, in response to Blanc's proposal, the government had been

sufficiently energetic to refuse this claim, behind which it saw clearly both the dictatorship of this man and the complete and immediate upheaval of the social order, yet was unable to do otherwise than accord him the foundation of the [Luxembourg] Commission.<sup>22</sup>

Created by Lamartine and his cronies, the Luxembourg Commission was soon reduced to a largely decorative and insubstantial entity whose purpose was to appease militant workers who wanted a social republic. Moreover, by making Blanc its chairman and Albert its vice-chairman, Lamartine shrewdly shunted the two radicals out of the cabinet and marooned them in the palace, a powerless if massive showpiece. As Marx was to put it, through the Luxembourg Commission,

the representatives of the working class were banished from the seat of the Provisional Government, the bourgeois part of which retained the real state power and the reins of administration exclusively in its hands; and side by side with the ministries of Finance, Trade and Public Works, side by side with the Bank and the Bourse, there arose a socialist synagogue whose high priests, Louis Blanc and Albert, had the task of discovering the promised land, of preaching the new gospel and of providing work for the Paris proletariat. Unlike any profane state power, they had no budget, no executive authority at their disposal. . . . While the Luxembourg sought the philosopher's stone, in the Hôtel de Ville they minted the current coinage.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless it should be noted that with the Luxembourg Commission, Blanc was genuinely trying to create the only socialistic alternative that a predominantly artisanal economy could have adopted to countervail the growth of industrial capitalism. Blanc's "socialist synagogue" sought to create producers' cooperatives, nationalize the Bank of France and the railroads, provide financial aid to a few experimental social workshops, encourage labor associations, and guarantee the "right to work". In its report to the government, clearly prepared by Blanc, the Luxembourg Commission proposed to establish

agricultural colonies in every department of France, each to be composed of a hundred families, with common kitchens and laundries, and also model housing complexes with their own schools, nurseries, libraries, baths, and gardens. Long anticipating reforms that were to be adopted generations later, Blanc hoped to see all workers provided with old-age pensions and state-sponsored insurance for the ill and financially deprived. Reformist and modest as these goals seem today, such proposals were innovative and even radical in 1840s France.

No other kind of socialism could have constituted an alternative to capitalism during the middle of the nineteenth century, when France was in a transition from a preindustrial economy to a modern industrial capitalist one. Socialism in the later sense of a nationalized economy would have been out of the question: few substantial branches of production existed, apart from railroads and banks, that could be taken over by a republican state. Nor was a factory-based socialism feasible: the factory system, while it had grown by leaps and bounds in Britain, had not yet rendered the French artisanal workshop a marginal and subordinate form of productive activity. Silk textiles were still made mainly in small workshops in Lyon; and although cotton goods were spun and woven by machine in large factories, the industry was still of secondary importance. As for Proudhonism, that alternative amounted to retreating to an economy that was already obsolete. If any cooperative economy was to come to France, it could not have been in a Marxist, Proudhonist, or Caberian form; it would have to be a scheme that, like Blanc's, was suited to an artisanal economy, all its weaknesses and statism notwithstanding.

But at best, the social workshops could have been only a brake on the growth of the factory system—they could hardly have been a substitute for it. Once England had introduced machinery for mass production, no country could compete with British goods. To create a cooperative economy, France's only alternative would have been to isolate itself from the world market, on which many of her artisans, especially her silk workers, depended for their prosperity. By the nineteenth century, the ascent of capitalism was all but impossible to arrest, and nothing short of complete economic isolation—a ruinous economic autarchy—could have prevented cheaply manufactured commodities from ultimately subverting most preindustrial systems of production.

In any case, Blanc's social workshops, although the most important plan to slow the advance of industrial capitalism, were never seriously adopted. As we will see in the next chapter, a scheme of "National Workshops" was introduced that, despite its similarity in name to Blanc's social workshops, bore no relationship whatever to his own socialist goal and, if anything, was used to discredit it.



## THE CLUB MOVEMENT

Even before the February Revolution, as we have seen, Paris had been the center of secret societies and illegal working-class organizations. The success of the revolution produced a politically active club movement that was unprecedented in France since the heyday of the Great Revolution. Clubs, as well as workers' corporations, educational societies, and rudimentary trade unions, emerged everywhere. Located in all the neighborhoods of Paris, many of these clubs bore a superficial resemblance to the old sectional assemblies of 1793, and they quickly became thriving centers for educating, discussing, and mobilizing the city's most militant workers and intellectuals, often with a view toward directly intervening in the city's political life.

In the weeks following the February barricades, few people understood the potentiality of the club movement more clearly than Auguste Blanqui, who had been freed from his domestic exile in Blois on February 24 and was hastening to Paris as the Provisional Government was being formed. On February 25, scarcely a day after the king's abdication, Blanqui spoke before the Club de Prado in a large dance hall, where he forcefully declared that under the new Provisional Government,

France is not republican. The Revolution that has just passed is nothing more than a happy surprise . . . Leave the men in the Hôtel-de-Ville to their impotence; their feebleness is a sure sign of their fall. Their power is but ephemeral; we—we have the people and the clubs, where we shall organize them in revolutionary fashion, as was the way of the Jacobins of old.<sup>24</sup>

For a time it seemed that this prediction of club empowerment might soon be fulfilled. Shortly after the monarchy fell, at least 203 political clubs were formed in the greater Paris area, 149 of which belonged to a common federation. Peter H. Amann, in his study of this mass democracy, conservatively estimates that total membership in the Parisian clubs numbered from 50,000 to 70,000, but "a somewhat higher figure in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand seems more likely." So avidly involved were workers in the club movement that in mid-March, when the novelist George Sand found herself locked out of her apartment, she had the greatest difficulty finding a locksmith. They were all attending club meetings. As Amann puts it, "Within a few weeks a mass movement had taken root"—and an organized mass movement at that.<sup>25</sup>

By mid-April, every neighborhood and *arrondissement* in the capital had clubs, mainly workers' clubs, whose meetings often drew thousands of members and informal participants. The larger clubs usually met in school buildings, churches, dance halls, municipal buildings, and even in cafés. They

varied considerably in structure: some were very formally organized, such as the *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, while others were quite informal and even free-wheeling. A few clubs consciously maintained continuities with the past. Some had members who had belonged to the secret societies: of seventeen club presidents in mid-March 1848 whose political backgrounds are known, ten were veterans of the prerevolutionary secret societies, most notably Blanqui and Barbès, who had been the leading figures in the *Salons* during the 1830s. The more radical clubs tended to subdivide themselves into "sections" or "cells," just as the illegal societies under the monarchy had done, despite the fact that such subdivisions were now superfluous. Other clubs consciously invoked names drawn from the Great Revolution, such as *Jacobins*, *Montagnards*, *Amis du Peuple*, *Egalité et Fraternité*, and *Commune*. Among the revolutionary periodicals that appeared were those titled *Père Duchêne* and *Vieux Cordelier*, invoking the memory of Hébert's and Desmoulins's papers of more than a half century earlier.

But most of the clubs had no roots in the earlier secret societies. Significantly, a large number of them had names including the words *Work* and *Workers*. Moreover, the class composition of the clubs was striking. Among half of the 178 club presidents whose occupations are known,

23 percent were workers, 22 percent intellectuals (writers, journalists, professors), 21 percent bourgeois (employers, proprietors, managers, rentiers—though this last category is ambiguous), 18 percent white-collar workers (ranging from clerk through bookkeeper to priest); 9 percent members of the "popular bourgeoisie" of wineshop owners, rooming house operators, modest greengrocers; and 5 percent university students.<sup>16</sup>

At least half of the club presidents thus consisted of workers and intellectuals, if students are included among the latter. This high proportion of workers and intellectuals is classical in revolutionary situations; in later uprisings revolutionary groups were often marked by even more radical intellectuals, in fact, than workers. Indeed, the intelligentsia—mainly public individuals and professionals—supplied the leaders of organizations that were predominantly working class in composition and orientation.

In 1848 the clubs held their meetings with extraordinary frequency. It was not uncommon for them to convene as often as four or five nights a week, a frequency redolent of the numerous section meetings during the Great Revolution. Most of the clubs still formally limited their meetings to twice a week, but this semiweekly schedule was commonly ignored during February and March. Blanqui's Central Republican Society—or Club Blanqui, as it was familiarly called—met every evening with the exception of Sundays. Rules were often honored in the breach; many clubs functioned with minimal formality, especially those whose meetings



were packed with thousands of tumultuous workers, and attendance in the more important clubs often ran into the thousands.

In addition to the numerous clubs, the radical political culture of 1848 included a burgeoning revolutionary press, which formed a vital lifeline between the clubs and the people. The clubs used both posters and periodicals, especially neighborhood ones, to announce their meetings and publish their minutes. The avidly read journals also published passionate orations. According to an official count, there were 171 newspapers in the capital, although only a minority were able to survive more than a few weeks. Working-class neighborhoods in particular were flooded with posters voicing a host of opinions, pamphlets advancing criticisms and demands, and the speeches of lecturers and street orators. Along with organized club meetings, this electrifying level of discussion produced a delirium of radical fervor. To the privileged classes it seemed that the Revolution had unleashed a social monster that only force could finally subdue.

Several of the clubs enjoyed enormous prestige, partly because famous radical leaders had helped to create them, and partly because of their radical views. Among the most important was Blanqui's Central Republican Society, which attracted hundreds, possibly thousands to a single meeting, including many spectators curious to see the notorious black-coated and black-gloved revolutionary par excellence. By shifting its meeting places to various locations in the capital, the Club Blanqui managed to reach a large cross-section of the Parisian working class. Its meetings were notable for their open and often heated discussions of ideas, and for the profusion of oratory that, as Arnaut observes, "Blanqui made no attempt to dominate."<sup>27</sup> But to join the Club Blanqui was no frivolous affair: a prospective member had to have two members as backers and sign a written oath of support.

Étienne Cabet's Central Fraternal Society, on the other hand, was notable for the formality of its proceedings and the authoritarian behavior of its founder. Cabet had created a dogmatic sect—the Icarians—based on his immensely popular novel, *Voyage to Icaria*, and his widely read periodical, *Le Populaire*. Some 4000 men and 1000 women belonged to the club, the majority of whom were working people and were apparently mesmerized by their famous leader. In the weeks immediately following the February uprising, the Central Fraternal Society drew enormous working-class audiences, possibly larger than any other club. By this time the word *communiste* was being used throughout Paris, and as a term of opprobrium it was replacing *anarchiste*, which had been used so promiscuously in the Great Revolution. Although Cabet himself was anything but a militant, *communisme* terrified the respectable strata of society, much to the glee of the workers. Cabet's Central Fraternal Society was basically nonrevolutionary and his views were surprisingly tepid, but in the spring of 1848 Parisian workers revered him. In March and April the sect's discipline

would temporarily propel Cabet and communism to the forefront of events. Comparable in its didactic tone to Cabet's club was François Raspail's *Société des Amis du Peuple* (Friends of the People), which was more an educational forum than a political arena. Raspail was widely respected by the workers for his tested commitment to their interests, but unlike Blanqui he tended to lecture his audiences rather than listen to them. At times his "courses," as he called them, drew as many as 4000 people. But none of these clubs compared in size with the older *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, which claimed nearly a 100,000 members, 34,000 of them in Paris. The club, reborn in 1848 after its suppression in the 1830s, was a neo-jacobin association that vaguely espoused the ideals of political equality contained in Robespierre's Preamble to the Constitution of 1793, tinged with quasi-socialistic 1840s concepts of justice. Its central committee included Armand Barbès, and it received subsidies from Ledru-Rollin's Ministry of Interior. Despite its attempt to make itself into a disciplined military organization, the *Droits* was marked more by ideological confusion than by coherence. In addition to his role in the *Droits* club, Barbès also collected a following in the *Club de la Révolution*, or *Club Barbès*, which gained a measure of fame mainly because he was its leader.

Apart from these "big name" clubs, many smaller and more transient clubs abounded everywhere. Attempts to unite them into a common revolutionary movement gave rise to various organizational alliances, but the effectiveness of these alliances was limited. The most famous was the Revolutionary Committee of the Club of Clubs, which played an important role in bringing various clubs into contact with one another, both within Paris and without. Like the *Droits*, the Club of Clubs took subsidies from the Ministry of Interior and was strongly inspired by Ledru-Rollin, but its most important function seems to have been to bring republican ideas and propaganda to the provinces, and to provide information about the provinces to Paris. Indeed, the many accounts of provincial revolutionary activity that appeared in the Club's reports provide the historian with one of the main sources of information about political activity outside Paris. Other federative clubs, like the Central Democratic Society and its rival, the Central Committee for the General Elections, were little more than temporary electoral coalitions, mainly designed to promote the middle-class republican candidates to the Constituent Assembly.

With all its many rivalries, coalitions, interactions, functions, and secret supporters, what is important about the club movement is that, in conjunction with the Luxembourg's Labor Assembly, it formed part of an independent working-class power that was emerging against the Provisional Government. As Amani observes, the clubs "constituted the apex, the revolution *en permanence*, the popular will organized, institutionalized, hardened."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, some of the clubs saw themselves as performing precisely this sort of role. The Democratic Club of Blancs Manteaux, for example, openly declared:



The members of the [Constituent] Assembly are our delegates, yet the sovereign people does not relinquish its powers and must watch over the discussions of the deputies. The clubs must necessarily be the voice of the people and the expression of its will.<sup>29</sup>

The strong implication of this statement is that the clubs were indeed a separate power, counterposed to the Provisional Government, as were the workers' corporations whose delegates gathered in the Luxembourg Palace. Nor did the government itself fail to ignore the danger that the clubs, together with the Luxembourg's Labor Assembly, posed to its sovereignty. William H. Sewell, Jr., in fact, has argued that the "workers' corporations were the closest equivalent, in 1848, to the sections of 1792-94."<sup>30</sup> Whether the workers' corporations and the clubs could have actually become a dual power is arguable. Eventually, the Luxembourg Assembly was dissolved (in fact, it was always a completely powerless body), and the corporations that made it up ceased to constitute "units of government," as Sewell has called them, comparable to the sections of the Great Revolution.<sup>31</sup> Many clubs, on the other hand, remained rooted in the neighborhoods of Paris, as the earlier sections had been, and discussed a wide range of political as well as economic issues.

Proudhon made the bright suggestion, in his periodical *Le Représentant du peuple* (April 28, 1848), that the mass democracy of the clubs could become a popular forum where the social agenda of the revolution could be prepared for use by the Constituent Assembly—a proposal that would essentially have defused the potency of the clubs as a potentially rebellious dual power. Owing to the intransigence of the government, which refused to yield the least amount of its power to any popular authority, Proudhon's suggestion came to nothing.

The Revolution, patently incomplete, was being pulled in two directions: by distinctly working-class demands on one side and a conventional middle-class republic on the other. This growing tension between mutually suspicious classes could not continue to exist for long, but could easily ignite into an open conflict at any time. In the days and weeks following the February barricades, the government had secretly built up its military forces, while the workers, for whom the passage of time without victory was an enemy, girded themselves for a renewed confrontation. In revolutions, where weeks telescope months and months telescope years, the confrontation was to come with rapidity and fury.

## NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), pp. 66-7.
2. According to Neil Stewart, the list did not include the names of Flocon, Marrast, Blanc, and Albert, and it was read out to the crowd at the Palais-Bourbon by Ledru-Rollin. See Neil Stewart, *Blanqui* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p. 99. I have chosen to follow Tocqueville's account, as he was in attendance.
3. Tocqueville, *Recollections*, p. 70.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
5. Alphonse de Lamartine, *History of the French Revolution of 1848*, trans. unknown (London: Bell & Daldy, 1851), p. 128. Aside from Lamartine's insufferable verbosity and tendentiousness, his is one of the most detailed accounts of the establishment of the Provisional Government.
6. Louis Blanc, *1848: Historical Revelations* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), pp. 16-17.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
8. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 29, 30, 32.
9. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx and Engels 1849-1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 54.
10. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 31.
11. Lamartine, *French Revolution of 1848*, p. 180.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 219-20.
15. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, pp. 81-2.
16. Quoted in Georges Duveau, *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 66.
17. William H. Sewell, Jr., "Artisans, Factory Workers, and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1789-1848," in *Working-Class Formations: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 65-6.
18. Blanc, *Historical Revelations*, p. 126.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.
21. William H. Sewell, Jr., "Property, Labor, and the Emergence of Socialism in France, 1789-1848," in *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. John M. Merriman (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1979), p. 59.
22. Émile Thomas, "Conversations with M. Marie," from *Histoire des ateliers nationaux: in Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, ed. Raymond Postgate (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 201-2.
23. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 55.
24. Blanqui quoted in Alphonse Lucas, *Les Clubs et les clubistes* (Paris, 1851), in *1848 in France*, ed. Roger Price, *Documents of Revolution* series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 72.



25. Peter H. Amann, *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 34, 35.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

29. *Ibid.*

30. William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 255.

31. *Ibid.*

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## CHAPTER 27 "Defeat of the Revolution!"

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Every revolution that fails to complete its social tasks immediately opens the way to counterrevolution and finally its own bloody annihilation. This principle can be taken as absolutely fixed. The vacuum that an unfinished revolution leaves behind is quickly filled by its enemies, who, sometimes presenting themselves as "compromisers," "realists," and "reasonable" men, try to harness the revolution and steer the energy it has churned up toward its own destruction. In the English Revolution irresolute Levellers such as Lilburne failed to use their influence with the army to move decisively against Cromwell; and in the Great French Revolution the *enragés*, lacking any coordinating leadership, were manipulated by Marat and delivered over to the Committee of Public Safety. A hesitant revolution is a doomed revolution.

The moment when a revolutionary situation crests and the insurgents are psychologically prepared to take control of society is therefore crucial. Even a delay of several days may result in the ebbing of the revolutionary tide. Few revolutionary leaders understood this more clearly than Lenin, who on the eve of the October Revolution demanded an immediate insurrection, in opposition to most of his own colleagues, and threatened to resign from the Bolshevik Central Committee because of its dilatory behavior.

The Parisian workers of 1848, having overthrown the monarchy, had arrived at just such a moment, yet their leaders were unwilling to seize it and replace the government that Lamartine and his allies had set up with a truly social republic. Like the July Monarchy, the Provisional Government had been brought to power by an insurrection, and its principal leaders—with the exception of Blanqui, Raspail, and possibly the weary Caussidière—were once again committed gradualists. Blanc, with his hazy notions of fraternity between employers and their employees, was wholly unwilling to try to match the growing armed forces of the government with an independent working-class force. Mesmerized by the ideal of *la République*, hamstrung by a limited notion of socialism—artisanal associationism—and led by the irresolute



Blanc, the revolution that the workers made in February was left tragically incomplete.

To be sure, ordinary Parisian workers understood the need to continue the revolution, or at least to accumulate their own stores of weapons, in anticipation of a struggle to defend it. In turn, the new government and the classes it represented realized that the arms possessed by the working people constituted the greatest potential threat they faced. On the morning of February 25, the day of the conflict over the red flag, a group of workers in the Place de Grève had demanded that the immense arsenal of the old regime at Vincennes be turned over to the people—a demand the government firmly opposed: convinced that the workers must not be permitted to accumulate even more weapons than they had, Lamartine sent out Flocon to quiet them. Flocon then accompanied a group of workers to Vincennes, where he allowed them to take only a few thousand muskets, carefully withholding the great bulk of the weapons and ammunition that were stored in the fortress. Lamartine, it is worth noting, afterward clasped Flocon's hands and fervently thanked him for "preserving the national arsenals"—and for using his radical credentials to pacify the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.<sup>1</sup> Once in power, Flocon, ostensibly a radical only days before, made every effort to control the masses and to place the reins of government securely in the hands of the privileged classes.

## REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

The new ruling classes also realized that to retain power they would have to create a reliable military force superior to anything the working class could organize. From the very moment they took office, even as Blanc was naively echoing Lamartine's appeals to *fraternité*, class cooperation, and republican unity, the rest of the Provisional Government's ministers began to systematically assemble a variety of military forces that could be used to control the working-class movement. Lamartine, in particular, had noticed that unruly working-class boys and teenagers played a major role in the barricade fighting; owing to their youth, they were the boldest and most reckless of the insurrectionaries. Sensing that their adventurous behavior could propel any popular unrest into an armed insurrection, the foreign minister shrewdly decided to harness them into a special force in the government's service. In one of his earliest decrees during the early morning of February 25, Lamartine established the Mobile Guard, a force to be composed of youths between sixteen and thirty years of age. In the next few weeks, some 25,000 youths, almost entirely from the working class, were recruited into twenty-four battalions and placed at the disposition of the government.

The Mobile Guard, unlike the National Guard, was no citizens' militia: on the contrary, its members were single men housed in their own barracks and isolated as much as possible from the general population. The government took every precaution to keep them from fraternizing with their fellow citizens in the neighborhoods. They were given distinctive uniforms and were armed and equipped at the state's expense. Carefully trained in urban fighting, they were treated as an elite corps, flattered as the government's praetorians, and slowly weaned from any loyalty to their own social class. They were even paid a wage of a franc and a half daily—a relatively comfortable sum for single young men. Although they were allowed to elect their own officers, the officers they elected had to be approved by the commanding general and the minister of war, who were professional military men detached from the regular army.

Almost alone among the republican leaders, Blanqui recognized that the *mobiles* were precisely the praetorian guard of the privileged classes and that they constituted a sword pointed at the very heart of working-class resistance. From the first meetings of his Central Republican Society, he vigorously denounced the recruitment of this extremely dangerous force, calling not only for its disbandment but for that of all other professional military forces. For their part, the ruling classes knew that they were taking a dangerous gamble in creating the Mobile Guard. As working-class "children" or youths in the main, their political allegiances were uncertain. In the event of a working-class insurrection, would these young men stand with their families and neighbors in their districts? Or would they obey their officers? This ambiguity was heightened precisely by their youthful bravado, which had verged on uncontrollable elation in the face of battle. Whoever gained the loyalty of the *mobiles*, it was suspected, would control Paris. Upon viewing a parade of the Mobile Guard and other military units on the Champ de Mars, Tocqueville nervously opined:

The battalions of the Garde Mobile uttered various exclamations, which left us full of doubt and anxiety as to the intention of these lads, or rather children, who at that time more than any other held our destinies in their hands.<sup>2</sup>

The workers, for their part, uneasily observed the Provisional Government sequestering their "children" in barracks, then using regular army officers to indoctrinate them. They tried, as best they could, to reach their sons and restore their sense of class identity. But for the first months of the force's existence, their political ideas—if they had any—remained hidden in their barracks.

As for the social aims of the Revolution, the workers, who knew their enemies well, were becoming guarded, even as Blanc tried to establish a few token social workshops. They viewed with alarm not only the formation of the Mobile Guard but the resistance and increasing arrogance of the well-equipped bourgeois National Guards toward the common people. And they took note of the growing



belligerence of the employers and the seething hatred of the privileged classes toward the workers' social aims. Even if Blanc did not, workers of the Luxembourg and the militant workers in Paris generally realized they might well be thrown into a serious collision with the privileged classes of the realm.

## THE NATIONAL WORKSHOPS

Shortly after the Place de Grève had been cleared of insurgents in February, a young engineer, Émile Thomas, formerly a student at the École Centrale, approached the minister of public works, Marie, with a proposal. Thomas, an ambitious man, had a fanciful vision of a new France in which all workers would eventually become prosperous enough to become members of the bourgeoisie. As a step in the realization of this utopia, he suggested that the unemployed be rounded up and given temporary employment in public works through a state-subsidized and state-controlled system of "National Workshops."

To Marie, a member of the erstwhile dynastic opposition, the prospect of neutralizing unrest among the unemployed by transforming them into clients of the state was irresistible. On March 23 the minister of public works advised the young engineer (Thomas was only twenty-six at the time) that the government was prepared to accept his proposal and give a five-million-franc subsidy to establish the Workshops.<sup>1</sup> The minister then took Thomas aside and told him to take the unemployed "in hand" and "attach them" to himself. He should spare no expense in creating his workshops, he advised Thomas, and he placed the ministry's "secret fund" at his disposal.

Naively, the new director asked Marie, "What object, other than public calm, have your recommendations?" To which the minister replied: "Public safety. Do you think you can manage to command your men altogether? It may be that the day is near when it will be necessary to march them into the streets"—that is, against their fellow workers. In fact, Thomas proceeded to follow Marie's recommendation and organize the Workshop enrollees, numbering some 120,000 at their peak, into military-style units—such as companies, battalions, and brigades—under his own command, with subordinate officials composed of his middle-class student friends. In effect, with Thomas's assistance, Marie had created still another potentially counterrevolutionary army.

The immediate impact of the announcement of the National Workshops was to draw a 100,000 unemployed Frenchmen from the provinces into the capital, seeking temporary work. Those who were given jobs were paid two francs daily, a very modest wage for men with families and other expenses. But an additional 50,000 provincials arrived for whom there were no National Workshop jobs at all. Once in Paris, they lingered in the city, adding to the

hunger and restlessness that existed among the working class generally. Some National Workshop enrollees were given no actual work to perform, as Georges Duveau observes:

The workers enrolled in the National Workshops spent most of their time playing billiards and making speeches in praise of the social-democrat Republic. Here and there a few were to be found carting one or two barrowloads of sand on the Champ de Mars or the heights of Belleville. They did a bit of digging and then went back to their games or talk.<sup>4</sup>

Duveau's description more closely reflects the image of the National Workshops fostered by the bourgeois press than reality; thousands of National Workshop employees were, in fact, fully occupied with useful jobs. They replanted the trees that had been felled to form the February barricades, leveled the Champ de Mars into an attractive public mall, manufactured clothing and shoes for other unemployed workers, and, in Marseilles, helped to dig a much-needed canal. Nor were the unemployed artists of Paris neglected; they were put to work painting republican propaganda posters and creating other politically inspirational artwork.

Yet the invidious image of the Workshops as a dole for idlers soon became prevalent among the middle classes, an image that, like the Luxembourg, was pointedly used against the radicals. "Marie told me," says Thomas,

that it was the determined intention of the Government to allow the experiment (of the Luxembourg) to have its run; that in itself it would have the good result of convincing the workmen of the emptiness of Louis Blanc's inapplicable theories; . . . that in this manner the working classes would be disabused by the experience; that their idolatry of Louis Blanc would of itself crumble to pieces, and that he would lose for ever all his influence, all his prestige, and cease to be a danger.<sup>5</sup>

Predictably, the press had a field day with the National Workshops, sneeringly identifying them with the Luxembourg Commission and socialism. Indeed, the project was given the name National Workshops in a calculated move to confuse it in the public mind with Blanc's social workshops. Marie and the bourgeoisie spared no effort to turn the workers' demands for the "right to work" into a socialistic chimera. By vitiating this major demand, Marie divested the uprising of February 24 of much of its social meaning.

Blanc, for his part, responded with virulence against Marie's cynical debasement of his socialistic plans. He condemned the National Workshops as a

rabble of paupers, who it was enough to feed, from the want of knowing



how to employ them, and who had to live together without any other ties than a military organisation, and under chiefs who bore the name, at once so strange and yet so characteristic, of sergeants-majors—brigadiers.<sup>6</sup>

But his attacks against the National Workshops as cesspools of idleness and militarism were as inept as they were self-defeating. To Marie's delight, Blanc's denunciations served to pit the Luxembourg Commission and its Labor Assembly against the tens of thousands of workers who were drawing their sole livelihood from Thomas's brigades, thereby opening a dangerous rift within the ranks of the working class itself.

Yet the normally employed workers had reason to resent the National Workshops, which had become a mercenary military force intended for use on behalf of the privileged classes. In fact, by mid-spring, Émile Thomas had effectively rallied the sympathies of most of the National Workshop workers behind the Provisional Government. Materially, he purchased their support by paying them a regular wage; psychologically, he gained their enthusiasm by staging celebratory festivals that were carefully designed to inculcate a strong military spirit that could be placed at the service of the state. A little more than a month after the February barricades were dismantled, the Ministry of Public Works and the Provisional Government generally were lavishly spending public funds to create a counterrevolutionary army that could be deployed against the same Parisian workers who had shed their blood to bring the Republic into existence.

## THE JOURNÉE OF MARCH 17

By no means had the Republic as yet sunk deep roots into the country's middle classes, still less into people at all levels of rural society. Royalism was still widespread in France, and the masses in the countryside and in a few provincial capitals viewed the events in Paris, and the radical working class that propelled them, with deep hostility. Yet with each month that passed after the February Days, the influence of radical ideas in Paris itself receded, and the workers' faith even in a "formal" democratic republic, let alone a social republic, began to wane. At the same time the forces of reaction were regaining their confidence and mobilizing against the limited social achievements of the February republic. In the opening passage of his *Class Struggles in France*, a remarkable work that has been the point of departure for many historians of the 1848 Revolution, Marx observed that, "with the exception of only a few chapters, every more important part of the annals of the revolution from 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: *Defeat of the Revolution!*"<sup>7</sup>

Marx appropriately identified the various stages that led to this defeat with four major *journées* that the Parisian working class carried out that spring, at almost one-month intervals: namely, those of March 17, April 16, and May 15, culminating in the working-class insurrection of June 23. With each *journée*, the influence of the radicals declined, and the power of the counterrevolution became stronger and its policies more resolute.

The first *journée*, which took place on March 17, began when the clubs and the various trade organizations made plans for a demonstration against the government, in support of three demands that the clubs had generally agreed upon. First, they wanted to postpone the date for the national elections to the Constituent Assembly. The Provisional Government had originally set these elections for April 9, but the close proximity of that date did not give the republicans in the cities sufficient time to bring the message of the Revolution to people in the countryside, least of all to the peasantry, which was still strongly influenced by the country priesthood and fearful of the local gentry. The republicans strongly felt that before the national elections were held—and especially since the new assembly would be authorized to write a new constitution for France—the Republic should have the opportunity to establish its legitimacy in the provinces and to educate the peasantry about republican ideas. The election date of April 9 was little more than three weeks away. A revolution that had yet to fully define itself even in progressive Paris could hardly be expected, in so short a time, to gain the support of illiterate peasants, most of whom looked to highly reactionary clerics for leadership.

In fact, the Republic itself, far from reaching out to the peasants for support, had taken a step that grievously and irreconcilably alienated them. On March 16, strapped by mounting financial problems, it had voted to impose a levy of forty-five centimes on every franc due not in income taxes but in property taxes. Agreeable as this measure was to the bankers of Paris, the levy increased by nearly fifty percent the tax burden on small landholders, effectively turning poor, hardworking peasants against the cities.

Nor was the peasantry sympathetic with the workers' demands for a social republic. The press was largely succeeding in turning public opinion in the provinces against the "reds" in Paris, and the National Workshops in particular were used by periodicals and pulpits to stoke deep resentment among the peasants. Goaded by the propaganda of rural reactionaries as well as urban ones, these small parochial proprietors were convinced that the new property tax was meant to subsidize idlers in the Workshops. Blanqui, realizing that the tax would be "the death sentence of the republic," fought it vigorously.<sup>8</sup> As Priscilla Robertson observes,

The 45-centime tax may have saved the republic from bankruptcy, but it also killed it by arousing the hatred of the countryside. From that day all the



propagandists, including Louis Napoleon, who tried to win the peasants, promised its repeal.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was imperative that the Left and even moderate republicans gain more time to win over the country as a whole to republicanism, lest reactionary representatives gain the majority in the Constituent Assembly. The demonstrators of March 17, on Cabet's suggestion, made it a cardinal demand that the elections be postponed to May 31, although even that delay was clearly too short to get rural voters to shed their well-entrenched rural prejudices and adopt views advanced by urban radicals.

An issue of almost equal importance—and in Blanqui's eyes, of more importance—was the date for the election of National Guard officers. In accordance with the new policy of democratizing the Guard, its amiable commanding general in Paris, the Viscount de Courtais, had offered to open fourteen positions on his staff exclusively to workers. But from the radicals' perspective, the date of the election of these officers, like the date of the Assembly elections, was set too early. It did not allow sufficient time for fraternization between the newly enlisted workers and the veteran middle-class Guards to make possible the election of authentic republican officers. More fully than any of his associates, Blanqui, the most class-conscious and able tactician among the club leaders, grasped that more time would be needed for the new working-class Guards to overcome the traditional class prejudices of the bourgeois veterans. The demonstrators of March 17, again on Cabet's suggestion, demanded that the National Guard elections be postponed from late March to April 5, which was still a minimal and ineffectual delay.

The third and final issue for the planned demonstration involved the presence of regular army contingents in Paris, which deeply vexed the workers. Although these residual troops, according to Ledru-Rollin, numbered only about 2000, the workers were wary of the government's reasons for keeping them in the capital at all. Moreover, they had reason to suspect that Lamartine was in secret communication with the commander of regular army troops in Lille and with other officers who commanded full-sized brigades, some of which could quickly arrive at the capital by rail. The size and position of the military forces at the government's disposal thus was a troubling issue in the minds of the militant workers, who had no well-organized force of their own to defend their interests. They wanted the army contingents to be removed.

All of these concerns were reinforced on March 9, when a demonstration of three thousand businessmen marched from the Bourse, or Parisian stock exchange, to the Hôtel de Ville, threatening to lock out their workers if their maturing notes were not granted a three-month extension. Although their demonstration was followed by a crowd of students who voiced their support for the government against the Bourse, it was apparent that reactionary

discontent was now migrating from private homes and cafés to the streets, vitiating the *fraternité* that had prevailed during the February barricades.

Blanqui, mindful of the gravity of the situation, tried on March 14 to bring the republican clubs together to make a common public show of strength. At a meeting in the home of Benjamin Flou, he helped form a central committee that consisted of representatives of 14 clubs and 300 labor organizations, with the goal of petitioning the government for the satisfaction of their three demands. When the council of ministers refused to receive the committee's spokesmen, the working-class leaders decided that the time had arrived to give open expression to their demands by calling a mass demonstration in the capital.

This demonstration probably would have been held later than March 17, but it was precipitated by a parade of elite units of the National Guard who were determined to protest what they regarded as the excessively egalitarian principles of the Revolution. By the Provisional Government's decree of February 24 opening the Guard to all able-bodied adult males, some 90,000 newcomers were now poised to enter the militia's ranks. Most of them were workers, raising the possibility that they might outnumber the middle-class Guards. Mass pressure from the workers, moreover, compelled the Provisional Government to dissolve the Guard's elite bourgeois grenadier battalions—distinguished by their ornate uniforms and high bearskin hats, or *bonnets à poil*—and disperse them among socially mixed legions. These disbanded "bearskins," as they were called, were now faced with the socially humiliating prospect of having to serve in units composed of members of the lower classes—and the prospect of marching alongside shabby workers with calloused hands made them shudder.

On March 16, in protest of this threatened degradation, some 30,000 *bonnets à poil*, resplendently uniformed, marched through the streets of the capital to the Hôtel de Ville. En route, when the "bearskins" reached the Pont au Change (near Notre Dame), they encountered an angry group of cabinetmakers, mechanics, and typographers who vigorously shouted: "Down with the *bonnets à poil*!" This counterdemonstration of the workers may not have been entirely spontaneous; some reports have it that Caussidière, the police prefect and a close associate of Ledru-Rollin, had rallied the working-class hecklers to humiliate the elite Guards and give them a public tongue-lashing.

Nonetheless, the demonstration of the "bearskins" in support of their elite status revealed once again that, less than a month after the February Days, reaction was already openly mobilizing its supporters. To the heckling of the workers on the Pont au Change, the Guards flung back, with equal hostility, "Down with the communists!" and "Down with Ledru-Rollin!" These imprecations were peculiarly hollow; the word *communist* at this time denoted the followers of the pacifist ideas of Cabet, who in February, despite his



communist beliefs, had enjoined the insurgents to scrupulously respect private property and support the middle-class republic. Indeed, in the opinion of the Countess d'Agoult and even Lamartine, Cabet's generally moderate views had played a role in restraining the Parisian workers from challenging the Provisional Government. Even more absurdly, Ledru-Rollin, a founder of the moderate *La Réforme*, was drifting steadily to the right and trying to shed his image as a radical. Nonetheless, that thousands of Guards would openly denounce the tepid acolytes of Cabet and the left-leaning liberalism of Ledru-Rollin would have been inconceivable a few weeks earlier. As Georges Duveau notes, the cry "Down with Ledru-Rollin!" is "worth remembering, for it was the first time the reactionary element had raised its voice."<sup>10</sup>

The March 16 demonstration of the elite Guards failed to alter the ministers' decision to eliminate their special status: the Provisional Government was still republican enough to stand by its own decree and the egalitarian principles it embodied. The Guards were informed that the democratization of their ranks would proceed as planned, and they had no choice but to submit to the government's changes. But the Parisian working class could not permit the arrogant behavior of the elite Guards to go unanswered, and on the night of March 16, the clubs were feverishly planning for a massive counterprotest against the "bearskins" and in support of their three basic demands.

The next morning, on March 17, an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people, mainly workers, rallied in the Place de la Concorde. The leadership of the march belongs not only to Cabet but also to Blanqui, who more than any single individual articulated the deeply felt concerns of the workers. The demonstrators carried a petition, drawn up by Cabet, to withdraw the remaining regular troops from Paris and postpone the National Guard and Constituent Assembly elections. Beating drums, singing the "Marseillaise," and chanting slogans, the crowd wound its way through the very center of bourgeois Paris to the Hôtel de Ville. In a solemn and orderly fashion, they strode behind the banners of their various trade organizations and clubs—indeed, a sea of banners, denoting the tide of associationism that had swept over the Parisian workers since the February Revolution—as well as a multitude of tricolors, and the national flags of all the exiles in Paris, including the Russian flag, for among the exiles in the march were the novelist Ivan Turgenev and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

The procession was massive. Indeed, the enormity of the crowd and its very orderliness were redolent of the great *journées* of 1792-93 and testimony to the latent power of the working classes and their extraordinary capacity for organization. Yet the demonstration struck panic into the hearts of the notables and bourgeoisie, who long associated republicanism with bloodthirsty mobs, riots, and terror. Ironically, although many of the demonstrators were merely expressing their support for the new Republic, this massive turnout stunned not only the middle classes but even moderate socialists who fancied the

demonstration too massive for their liking. Indeed, Blanc panicked at the size of the *journée* and began to tilt toward the government's side as soon as the first demonstrators reached the Place de Grève.

In retrospect, the March 17 demonstration was the largest show of republican strength in 1848. Moreover, it may well have been the only moment that spring when the working classes could actually have taken over the government with very little bloodshed. Such an insurrectionary plan, in fact, does seem to have existed: police chief Caussidière was eager to enlist Ledru-Rollin, the darling of the lower middle class, and Armand Barbès to join their old *Saisons* colleague Blanqui and mobilize the workers for an uprising. The revolt he envisioned was to purge the government of its conservative members and turn the Revolution leftward.

Such an attempt, had it been made, could well have succeeded, since no military force yet existed in Paris that was strong enough to prevent it. But Ledru-Rollin was too eager to curry favor with the moderate republicans to collaborate with Blanqui. Nor would Barbès even think of joining forces with his old co-conspirator, who he had come to hate with an almost manic frenzy. Indeed, in Max Nomad's judgment, "the fate of the Revolution of 1848 was sealed by the contemptuous attitude toward Blanqui of Ledru-Rollin and Blanc, and the growing hatred of Barbès.

The moment was very favorable for a well-nigh bloodless revolution which would have removed the Right from the Provisional Government. But such a victory would have meant the ascendancy of the Richelieu of the Revolution, as some historians have called Blanqui. . . . As a result, not only near radical-Liberals like Ledru-Rollin, and moderate socialists like Louis Blanc, but even revolutionary communists like Armand Barbès, who incidentally had a personal grudge [against Blanqui], preferred to remain passive—thus paving the way for a complete victory of the Right.<sup>11</sup>

Blanqui, whose strategic sense of revolutionary possibilities had become more sophisticated over the years, may well have been unwilling to do more than purge the Provisional Government of reactionaries. But if Nomad's speculations are correct, then it would seem that the Revolution of 1848 was doomed to failure in part, at least, by the pettiness and irresolution of its key radical leaders. The result was that the demonstration did nothing but terrify the bourgeoisie without gaining much for the workers.

When the parade reached the Hôtel de Ville, the meeting that took place between the workers' delegation and the Provisional Government ministers was a study in pathos. The ministers, including Blanc, were obliged to leave the safety of the Hôtel de Ville and descend its steps to face the crowded Place de Grève as a visible acknowledgment of the demonstrators' petition. The more



militant workers in the square were hardly deceived by this gesture. As Blanc was to later recount, "a man of energetic mein, and whose flashing eyes lit up the extreme paleness of his face, rushed impetuously towards me, and seizing me by the arm, wrathfully exclaimed, 'You are then a traitor, even you!'"<sup>12</sup>

This angry accusation was not without justification. To be sure, the ministers did accede to some of the demonstrators' demands. Mainly on the insistence of Blanc and Albert, they agreed to postpone the National Guard elections to April 5, and they agreed to postpone the national elections—although not to May 31, as the demonstrators had wanted, but to April 23, leaving committed republicans and socialists with little more than a month to produce a sea change in the peasantry. But the ministers adamantly refused to budge on the demand for the removal of the remaining army troops, ostensibly on the grounds that the bulk of the army was outside the capital—which in itself was very unnerving to the workers.

Thus, in retrospect, the March 17 *journée* was a failure. It had achieved only a few concessions from the Provisional Government, and it left the split within the National Guard unhealed. The revolution remained incomplete, not only in a social sense but even in a formal sense. The democratic gains of the February period had been extremely fragile to begin with and could easily be swept away by a reactionary Constituent Assembly. Finally, having frightened the bourgeoisie and notables by its size and force, the *journée* propelled them into taking serious action against any prospective working-class challenge. The history of revolutions shows repeatedly that there is nothing more dangerous than a terrified middle class, whose vindictiveness is matched only by its cowardice. The militant workers in the clubs seemed to understand this, and for nearly a month after March 17, they placarded the city with warnings that Lamartine and his ministers were risking a serious confrontation with the masses.

## THE JOURNÉE OF APRIL 16

If the March 17 *journée* was "the last glorious day of the democratic party," to use the words of Louis Ménard,<sup>13</sup> thereafter the shaky bloc of moderate republicans, radical republicans, socialists, and communists—of workers and middle classes—who had supported the republic despite their mutual distrust, began to fall apart as each divided against the others, along not only class but even vocational lines.

This process of disintegration was accelerated two weeks after the *journée*, when a sensational effort was made to defame Blanqui and to divide the radical movement. Almost ten years earlier, according to one Jules Taschereau,

Blanqui, while in police custody, had confessed confidential information about the *Saisons* putsch of May 1839. This seemingly compromising "confession," which Taschereau published in his *La Revue rétrospective*, contained information about the alleged plot that only Blanqui and a few of his co-conspirators could have known. Barbès, whom Blanqui had dragged from his sybaritic lifestyle at his estate in the south to participate in the 1839 uprising, was now only too eager to corroborate Taschereau's questionable claims and thoroughly blacken his old comrade's name.

In Paris the sensational document became a widely discussed topic in cafés and salons, even leading to street brawls. Appearing as it did in the aftermath of the March 17 *journée*, its authenticity might reasonably have been viewed with deep suspicion. Taschereau himself had been a suspected police informer under Louis-Philippe, while Barbès was by now Blanqui's sworn foe. Above all, the "revelation" came at a very convenient time for the government: it knew only too well that its greatest danger came from Blanqui and his associates. Nothing could have served its purposes better than to defame the old revolutionary and thereby foment a serious division in the radical camp.

There is no compelling evidence, however, that Blanqui actually made the confession published by Taschereau. The document was not written in his hand, nor was his name even mentioned in it. Moreover, even if Blanqui had made it, he certainly gained absolutely nothing from doing so—neither the police nor the judicial system treated him with any leniency whatever. A close study of the document, in fact, revealed that it contained very little that was not already known to other people in the *Saisons* or to the police spies who had infiltrated the organization.

Blanqui's reply, as logical and powerful as it was, might have blasted his opponents to the lower depths and laid to rest most of the accusations against him, had he not been beleaguered by so many opponents who were eager to believe the document, discredit him personally, and above all divide the revolutionary movement that he had done so much to organize. Although the Taschereau document cast a shadow over him that persisted to the end of his days, it did little to diminish Blanqui's influence with the workers, many of whom all but revered him for his dedication and sacrifices.

While the Taschereau document was generating mistrust and inciting acrimony among the various republican factions, the government was busily engaged in bolstering the military forces at its command, bringing the Mobile Guard up to full strength. At the same time it tried to fan the prejudicial flames that divided the working-class and bourgeois units of the National Guard. The privileged classes, frightened by the March 17 *journée*, were soon spoiling for another confrontation. When it finally came, it was under circumstances that were so idiosyncratic that, were its effects not so tragic, it might well have constituted a comedy of absurd errors.



On April 5, the general elections for the National Guard officers were held as scheduled. But for a variety of reasons, republican and working-class candidates who were challenging the veteran Guard officers did not receive enough votes to prevail. The commander of the National Guard, Courtais, thereupon decided to allocate fourteen staff officer positions specifically for working-class members, in a special election that was to take place at the Champ de Mars on the morning of April 16.

Moreover, apparently on Blanc's inspiration, the workers at the Champ de Mars were also expected to express their goodwill toward the republic by taking up a monetary collection in the government's behalf. It was then planned that they would march in a peaceful procession along the Right Bank to transport this "patriotic donation" to the Hôtel de Ville, carrying tricolors and trade banners in an orderly array. There they were also expected to present the government with a petition that mildly appealed for more socially oriented policies. The ministers were not in the dark about these plans: Blanc had advised them the day before that they should expect a peaceful march, and that the crowd would bring them not only a "patriotic donation" but a number of social demands as well.

The conservative ministers, however, were only too eager to treat this planned march as an insurrectionary *journée*. Feeding this strategy was a particularly reckless article in the *Bulletin de la République* on April 14, published while its editor was absent from his office. Written by George Sand, the article's provocative language threatened insurrection unless the upcoming Constituent Assembly elections, only a week away, returned a radical majority. As the famous novelist luridly put it:

Unless the elections bring about the triumph of social truth, if they are no more than an expression of the interests of one class, wrenched from the loyal and trusting people, then the elections which should be the salvation of the Republic will be its destruction, of that there can be no doubt. Then there will be only one road to the salvation for the people who set up the barricades, and that will be to demonstrate their wishes for a second time and put off the decisions taken by a false national representation.<sup>14</sup>

In anticipation of an insurrection, Lamartine says in his memoir, he frantically prepared his will and burned his secret papers, while still other ministers scurried around the capital, making preparations to counter a working-class uprising.

Sand also alleged that Blanqui was conspiring (this time without Barbès, Causidière, and Flocon) to use the upcoming "insurrection" to forcibly replace Lamartine with—of all people—that paragon of wayward radicalism, Ledru-Rollin. The month before, of course, Ledru-Rollin had contemptuously rejected

any collaboration with Blanqui and was himself moving steadily toward the right. Indeed, that Blanqui was conspiring to overthrow the government at all on April 16 is hardly credible. As Blanc has convincingly documented, on the day before the march the revolutionary spent several hours conversing in a rather amiable manner with Lamartine in the minister's home, who apparently was trying to use his irresistible charms—as he supposed—to win the radicals to his side. Marx, more realistically, writes that the government needed “an excuse for recalling the army to Paris,” which seems the most probable reason for its show of hysteria in reaction to the proposed demonstration.<sup>15</sup>

When the morning of April 16 arrived, tens of thousands of unarmed workers gathered at the Champ de Mars, wholly unaware that insurrectionary intentions were being imputed to them. In a festive but organized mass, they cast their ballots for their fourteen Guard officers, then took up the “patriotic donation” and began their march to the Hôtel de Ville. The demonstration was entirely peaceful, indeed almost solemn. Their trade banners and signs called for the “organization of labor” and an end to “the exploitation of man by man,” general slogans that were anything but provocative, still less menacing. Finally, the tone of their petition was anything but belligerent:

Citizens, the re-action raises its head; calumny, the favourite weapon of unprincipled and dishonourable men, is on all sides assailing with its venomous falsehoods the true friends of the people. It is for us, the men of the Revolution, men of action and devotedness, to declare to the Provisional Government that the people decree the Democratic Republic; that the people desire the abolition of man's servitude to man; that the people desire the organization of labor by association. *Vive la République! Vive le Gouvernement Provisoire!*<sup>16</sup>

Despite this exclamatory closing endorsement of the Provisional Government, a rumor was spread through Paris during the march that the workers were planning to seize the city hall and proclaim a “communist” government. Precisely who spread this rumor remains a mystery, but one of the ministers immediately authorized that the National Guard be summoned to arms, not by the usual *rappel* but by a “general alarm,” a rare drumbeat and bugle call that was sounded only in an extreme emergency or general state of siege.

The peaceful, mostly placid and unarmed demonstrators made their way from the Champ de Mars across the Pont Royal. As they moved toward the Hôtel de Ville, however, they suddenly ran up against some 50,000 armed and extremely hostile National Guards with muskets and bristling bayonets. The city hall was surrounded by a veritable army of Guards and even hostile workers from the National Workshops. Indeed, to reach the city hall, the demonstrators were obliged to file through a gauntlet of jeering Guards, who



derided them as "communists," while Mobile Guard units, which had been interspersed among the marchers, sectioned off the demonstrators into small groups, ostensibly to prevent a coup.

Who had ordered the provocative mobilization? Although several ministers later claimed this very dubious honor, it was actually none other than Ledru-Rollin, in consultation with Lamartine, who had placed the capital in a state of siege. The minister of the interior had now definitively cast his lot with Lamartine against the workers. Nor was he the only prominent radical to thoroughly discredit himself on April 16: Barbès, as a colonel in the National Guard, marched in full uniform at the head of his unit, prepared to defend the Hôtel de Ville against an attack by workers.

The workers were astonished by this reception, and they were no less astonished to learn that their delegation, bearing the "patriotic donation" for the Provisional Government, had been received not by the council's ministers but by the deputy mayor of the city. They were humiliated, even degraded by this behavior and by the large show of military force, which treated an orderly march as a virtual insurrection. It was now clear that two distinct worlds had emerged out of the February barricades—the masses of people who worked with their hands and the privileged population that lived off their labor. The government could no longer be trusted to defend the workers' interests, nor did the presence of Blanc and Albert alleviate the fact that it was bourgeois to the core. As Duveau metaphorically puts it,

The shop counter had carried the day over the factory bench, and from April 16 onward a great wave of social reaction began to spread over the country. "All devoted republicans," wrote Caussidière, "are lumped together under the name of communists."<sup>17</sup>

After April 16, the "party of order"—the privileged classes and the small shopkeepers, united in common hostility to the workers' demands—emerged with increasing strength and confidence. In fact, five days later, on April 21, the government predictably used the specious *journée* as an excuse to bring five army regiments—three infantry and two cavalry—into Paris. Although Albert, at the council of ministers, vehemently protested this provocative move, the ministers refused even to record their decision in the official *Moniteur*. Thus the decision to bring in army troops was legally withheld from the public at large, but ordinary citizens could soon see troop contingents and cavalry patrols at various strategic places in Paris. If the militants of April needed any evidence that the revolution was slipping from their hands, the steady tramp of line troops and the clatter of cavalry hooves on the cobbled streets was an ever-present reminder of their loss of power.

## THE GROWING CRISIS

In the days before the election of representatives to the Constituent Assembly, delegates from the Club of Clubs began to send to the capital ominous reports on the political state of mind in the rural areas of France. Writing on April 13 from Saint-Cloud, outside Paris, one delegate's report provided a remarkable description:

The farther I go from the big cities the more I come across memories of the past and incomprehension of the present. . . . In Paris among those great enlightened people who overturned the government of vested interests it is appreciated that social inequality is a thing of the past. People hope for the future that was proclaimed by the man from Nazareth. In the principal towns of the various departments you also find noble, loyal hearts, spirits that foresee the future opened up for us by the coming of the Republic. But in the smaller places everything is different. The citizens are the victims of their own selfishness, or narrow-mindedness and of deplorable prejudices.

The writer then went on to emphasize that the

bourgeoisie, nobles and money-grubbers, who yesterday were divided into many different camps, today make common cause in order to change the nature of the Revolution and to stem the tide of reform. . . . The workers who are still dependent on these people—and who feel it—do not dare to lift up their heads. In public or in the clubs they protest only by their silence against the anti-liberal sentiments expressed by the aristocrats.<sup>18</sup>

On April 23, Easter Sunday, adult males all over France went to the polls, most of them for the first time, to elect a Constituent Assembly. In accordance with the Provisional Government's decree mandating universal manhood suffrage, eighty-two percent of Frenchmen over twenty-one years of age participated in the elections. As Blanqui had warned, most of the provincial voters followed the guidance of their social betters, such as the notables, clergy, and employers, and in some backward areas peasants were marched in troops by priests to polling places or voted under the watchful eyes of local notables.

If the April 16 demonstration was a humiliating failure for the Parisian radicals, the results of these elections were a disaster for all conscientious French republicans. The new Constituent Assembly, a body of 900 representatives, was composed mostly of men from provincial France; in fact, it contained a larger proportion of landowners, priests, and nobles than any assembly that had been elected even under the highly restrictive suffrage permitted by Louis-Philippe. At least half of the new Assembly consisted of



"moderate republicans"—in many cases, a euphemism for former monarchists who, while voicing support for the republic, had not forsaken their reactionary convictions. Less than ten percent of the seats were gained by radical republicans (who thenceforth called themselves "Montagnards," after the Jacobins of 1793), and at least a third of the representatives were expressly monarchist in their leanings, mostly Orleanists and a small number of Bourbon Legitimists.

By no means was this reactionary Assembly willing to let Louis Blanc and Albert retain leading positions in the government, although both men did win seats in the Assembly. Indeed, however fainthearted Blanc may have been in advancing the interests of the workers, the new government wasted no time, after it convened on May 4, in eliminating him and Albert from its executive body. It dispensed with the Provisional Government's council of ministers and created a new council, the Executive Commission, to manage the country's affairs. Like the Directory during the First Republic, the Commission was composed of five men (a "Pentarchy," as its critics labeled it disdainfully) and was placed completely under the thumb of the reactionary Assembly.

The members of the five-man Commission were all representatives of the ruling classes: Lamartine, Arago, Marie, Garnier-Pagès, and Ledru-Rollin. (The once-radical Ledru-Rollin was made a member of the government only on the insistence of Lamartine, as an expression of appreciation for the minister's betrayal of the workers on April 16.) The Parisian workers, who had carried the brunt of the February fighting and, more than any other part of the population, had created the republic, had no representatives on the Commission at all. On May 4, as if to declare that the February Revolution was definitively over so far as the ruling classes were concerned, the Assembly officially proclaimed that France was merely a "formal" rather than a "social" republic, thus ending any hopes among the workers that their economic needs would be satisfied.

But the election of the predominantly reactionary Assembly cannot be blamed exclusively on the provincial vote alone. All of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois Paris—indeed, all men of property—had come out in force to defeat the working-class candidates, and their numbers were considerable. Out of the twenty radical candidates nominated by the Luxembourg Labor Assembly, Parisians elected only one, while Blanqui was defeated with a humiliating vote. Even the generally amiable and theatrical Barbès lost out in Paris and acquired a seat in the Assembly only because he was chosen by voters from a different department. As a whole, the Parisian electorate gave more votes to conservative ministers like Garnier-Pagès and Marie than to Louis Blanc. Although Blanc was elected as a representative, he received less than half the vote that was given to Lamartine, while Cahet, the darling of March 17, and the Fourierist Considérant suffered crushing defeats. The result was an Assembly that had little sympathy for the Parisian workers. As Samuel Bernstein observes,

A no-man's-land lay between the Assembly and workers. The Chamber was heavily committed to abide by the *status quo*. Consequently it made no advances to the workers, did nothing to ease their pains or to disarm their wrath. Theirs were fallen hopes. The illusions that had manded the National Workshops were dispelled. Only their charitable character remained to chide human dignity; and even this source of relief, rumour had it, would soon stop. . . . Workers were dispirited, nearly desperate.<sup>19</sup>

After the elections, popular participation in the club movement dropped precipitously: out of 200 clubs in the greater Paris area during March and April, fewer than sixty continued to meet in May and June, and clubs that had formerly attracted thousands of members shriveled to only a few hundred or less. Perhaps one reason for the decline was that many workers had regarded the clubs primarily as a means of preparing for the elections, abandoning them once the voting, with its disappointing results, was over. But the decline in the clubs also seems to have reflected the sense of defeat that the workers felt after the April 15 *journée*. But the clubs that remained were radical ones: they held discussions that ranged far beyond issues of parliamentary power to more social issues, giving greater attention than before to wealth differentials, the organization of work, and the need for a "democratic and social republic."

The reactionary complexion of the Constituent Assembly nurtured their radicalism enormously. Militants felt they had little reason to follow a parliamentary course of action, and they increasingly sensed that Blanc's and Caber's balms offered no possibility for improving their miserable condition. Even the cautious Blanqui returned to favoring organizations that resembled the secret societies of the 1840s. The *demimonde* that gained renewed vigor in the slums of Paris was one that favored armed working-class resistance.

## THE JOURNÉE OF MAY 15

The working-class radicals in the clubs made one last desperate effort to retake the initiative from the growing counterrevolution—notably, in the *journée* of May 15.

This *journée* centered on two issues. The most important was the question of Polish liberation, a cause that was very popular in the capital. At that moment Prussia was occupied with brutally mopping up a bloody insurrection in Polish Posen, while Austria had been bombarding the venerable Polish city of Cracow. A Polish *émigré* committee petitioned France for help, since immediate assistance by French troops would be able to prevent serious reprisals against the rebels. The clubs demanded urgently that, unless Russia and Prussia freed



Poland in the next twenty-four hours, France should declare war against the two countries.

But the Constituent Assembly was continuing a policy of nonintervention abroad, a policy that had been established by the Provisional Government shortly after the February Days. Lamartine, as minister of foreign affairs, had then informed the European powers that

the proclamation of the French Republic is not an act of aggression against any sort of government in the world. There are differences between forms of government which are as legitimate as the different sorts of character, of geographical situation, and of intellectual, moral and material development seen in various nations.<sup>20</sup>

With this reassurance to the continent's despots of their legitimacy, Lamartine had reduced the February Revolution to a purely national affair, peculiar to France in character and geography. But to militant French republicans, his statement stood in sharp contrast to the universalistic claims of the Great Revolution. It seemed to deny that France was the "mother of republics" and hence the foremost defender of liberty everywhere in the world. By all rights, they insisted, France must intervene to assist the cause of Polish liberty.

The second issue that gave rise to the *journée* was the demand, originally made by Blanc and Albert, that the Constituent Assembly create a Ministry of Labor and Progress. The demand had considerable support among the clubists, for whom it constituted a basic test of the Assembly's politics, determining whether the Second Republic would go beyond a purely formal republic to create a social republic as well. On May 11, when the Assembly flatly, indeed derisively, refused to create such a ministry, the workers knew that their interests had no place on the government's agenda.

Another *journée* was now unavoidable. The Parisian clubs, particularly infuriated by the refusal to help Poland, scheduled a demonstration for May 15, the day the Constituent Assembly was expected to debate French policy toward the desperate Polish situation. But did they also plan an insurrection? The increasingly reactionary *Le National* decided in retrospect that an uprising had indeed been planned. The day after the *journée*, the newspaper fumed that, under the cover of a demonstration "in support of Poland," a "plot was being mounted against the assembly, against the whole nation, whose life, essence, thought, and energy is expressed by the assembly."<sup>21</sup> But the closest anyone came to making a public call for an insurrection was Joseph Sobrier, a socialistic republican who was actively involved in organizing the demonstration.

Sobrier had briefly occupied the position of prefect of police in February and, shortly after the February uprising, had helped Caussidière organize the auxiliary "Montagnards" force (not to be confused with the Montagnards in the

Assembly). He was now editor of the important club newspaper *La Commune de Paris*. On May 11, after the constituent assembly rejected Blanc's Ministry of Labor and Progress, Sobrier editorially declared that "the time of vain hopes has passed." "Will the hour of justice perhaps soon strike?" he asked ominously, ending his warning with the same battle cry that had been voiced by insurgent silk workers in Lyon in 1834: "Live working or die fighting!" Moreover, Sobrier's house seems to have served not only as the editorial offices of the *Commune de Paris* but as an informal headquarters for a *journée*, where weapons were deliberately stockpiled to arm the demonstrators in the event of an insurrection. Seven draft decrees, written by a journalist for *La Commune de Paris*, one Seigneuret, were later discovered in Sobrier's home, announcing that representatives in the Assembly were "excluded from all power" and that a Committee of Public Safety was to be appointed. One decree irresponsibly listed as committee members individuals who had no truck whatsoever with his plans.<sup>22</sup>

Although accusations were made afterward that Blanqui had played a key role in planning the insurrection, his admonitions against rash action and his call for patience clearly belie such charges. The draft decrees found in Sobrier's house provide no evidence of his involvement in any attempted uprising. Nor does the fact that he appeared in the crowd on May 15 constitute evidence that he planned even to participate in a coup, let alone lead one. In fact, Blanqui was quite convinced that an attempted coup at that time would be a failure. Loyal to his club, he seems to have obeyed its decision to participate in the *journée* only reluctantly. Indeed, according to one newspaper account, Blanqui argued fervently for restraint. In response to a speaker who

demanded that the people should take action immediately, ... the president of the club, M. Blanqui himself, has spoken out against him two days running, declaring that it would be imprudent to embark on matters in so hasty and drastic a fashion, that the working masses have so far no firm principles, and that by trying to press on so fast there was a risk of bringing everything into jeopardy.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever plans for an insurrection were afoot, not only did Blanqui oppose them but so did Barbès and even Sobrier, who was reported to have soon been depressed about its prospects for success.

When May 15 came, a crowd assembled at the Place de la Basille and began a solemn march to the Palais Bourbon. Estimates of the size of the column range from about 10,000 to 20,000. The actual number was likely somewhere in between, probably toward the lower end of the numerical spectrum. In any case, it was substantially smaller than the huge *journée* of March 17, and few of the demonstrators carried any arms. According to the plan, such as it may have been, if the crowd was fired upon, the demonstrators were expected to rush



home to retrieve their weapons, and only then return to fight—a logistically difficult if not absurd scenario.

No sooner did the demonstrators reach the Palais Bourbon than they came up against contingents of the Mobile Guard and National Guard, which had been deployed to protect the Assembly. General Courtais, who still commanded the National Guard, was disposed, because of his republican sentiments, to treat the demonstrators in a genial, if firm, manner. He tacitly ordered the Guards not to fire on the crowd and instead agreed to admit into the Chamber a delegation of twenty-five demonstrators, bearing a petition that called for a war in support of the Poles. But once the doors to the Palais Bourbon were opened, thousands of agitated demonstrators burst through, flooding the galleries to a point where the floors began to collapse. Some of the insurgents were forced to drop to the floor below, while others were swept directly into the assembly hall, where the deputies sat in frozen silence. Whether Blanqui cried "Forward!" to the surging crowd, as he is alleged to have done, is arguable; if he did, the old insurrectionist may have been temporarily carried away by the excitement of the moment. In any case, if there is any truth to the allegation, he seems to have quickly regained his composure and self-possession and behaved with considerable prudence.

Although the mayhem that followed this invasion seemed, to all appearances, like the kind of insurrectionary *journée* that had marked the Great Revolution, the appearance was entirely deceptive. Since the crowd was neither armed nor voiced any intention of disbanding the Assembly, it obviously had no plans to take over the government. It was moved more by a generous passion to aid the Poles than by any clearly formulated putschist intentions. If anything, the club leader François Raspail, an ardent revolutionary, read the petition on behalf of the Poles with deliberate and monotonous slowness (as he later told the court that tried him for his role in the May 15 events) in order to calm the crowd. Indeed, so much was Poland on the crowd's mind that when Blanqui, all but swept up to the dias of the Assembly, attempted to shift its attention from Poland to the organization of labor, he was quickly interrupted by Sobrier with the cry: "No, this is not what matters. Poland! Tell us about Poland!" This cry was echoed throughout the Chamber, compelling Blanqui to return to the main subject of public interest. As Duveau emphasizes, what the crowd wanted, despite its economic desperation, "was to sweep oppressive kings and oppressed peoples from the face of Europe. They wanted Ireland, Italy, Poland to be free."<sup>24</sup> Even the British ambassador Lord Normanby, a bitter enemy of the insurgents, noted that the crowd was anything but ill-humored and dangerous. In no way did they threaten the immobilized deputies who remained behind, many of whom, like Tocqueville, calmly sat out the Assembly's session with dignified imperturbability.

But the clubists who called the *journée* did not count on the emotional

instability of one of their leaders, Aloysius Huber, a fixture from the old demimonde of the secret societies, who seems to have been completely carried away by the uproar. Shoving Blanqui aside, Huber almost hysterically declared that the Constituent Assembly was dissolved. His declaration was echoed by calls from unknown individuals calling on the crowd to march to the Hôtel de Ville. This was indeed an open call for an insurrection. The excited crowd instantly set off for the city hall, with memories of the February uprising and its itinerary still fresh in their minds. In the background, they could hear the *rappel* being beaten, summoning the National Guard to arms to quell their action.

The *journée* was part mayhem, part farce—part, perhaps, the work of government agents as well—while the “takeover” of the Parisian city hall verged on opera bouffe. Barbès, notwithstanding his initial opposition to the whole affair, rushed to the forefront of the march, probably to upstage his old rival Blanqui—who, in fact, wisely lingered behind and soon drifted away. Under Barbès’s leadership, and with Albert’s support, the demonstrators arrived at the Hôtel de Ville and took over one wing of the building. They encountered no resistance: the officer commanding the guard of the huge structure, one Colonel Rey, was an old friend of Barbès and made no attempt to forcibly prevent the unarmed crowd from occupying the city hall.

Meanwhile the mayor of Paris, Marrast, simply shifted over to the other wing of the Hôtel de Ville, where he printed counterstatements against the “insurrection” and dropped them from windows to the crowd below. Barbès, from his own wing, proceeded to issue two decrees. “The people having dissolved the National Assembly, there remains no power but that of the People itself,” announced one, so the existing Constituent Assembly was replaced with a new “Commission of Government.” A second decree declared that “the Russian and German governments” were faced with war if they failed “to reconstitute Poland.”<sup>25</sup>

What emerges from the various conflicting accounts of this event is that, after an hour of such operatics, a National Guard artillery officer arrested Barbès, and he, together with Raspail, Sobrier, Albert, and other working-class leaders, were carted off to jail. Blanqui managed to elude the police for ten days until he too was jailed. As to the crowd, it quickly dispersed once the Guard arrived, and its leaders were hauled away without resistance.

The demonstration of May 15 and its farcical “insurrection” provided the government with exactly the pretext it needed for curtailing working-class activities. Caussidière, who had stayed out of the entire adventure, was compelled to surrender his strategic position as chief of police to a “moderate republican,” and his armed “Montagnard” forces were disbanded. Blanc, who had barely escaped serious injury at the hands of the National Guards in the Palais Bourbon, had to use all his eloquence to retain his seat in the Assembly. In all, several hundred people were temporarily rounded up. All the militant



clubs and even the moderate ones were closed down for a time, and leaders such as Blanqui and Raspail, whose guidance would have been invaluable to the workers in the battles that lay ahead, were imprisoned.

Early in June, the Assembly passed a general law banning all street gatherings. This law, as Robertson observes, was so "ferocious" that "to stand unknowingly next to a person bearing a concealed weapon became a crime. The monarchy's decrees seemed mild in comparison." But the ban on gatherings did not subdue the workers of Paris. Indeed, having been pricked by the thorns of a reactionary parliamentary republic, the workers, Robertson adds, "began making cartridges again in their suburbs."<sup>26</sup>

In the weeks before the May 15 *journée*, the Executive Commission decided to proclaim a "Festival of Concord," summoning all Parisians and provincials to the Champ de Mars in order to publicly express their feelings of national *fraternité*—and, above all, their solidarity with the government. The date had been set for Sunday, May 14. But when the fourteenth came around, the government and the Luxembourg Commission were locked in an angry battle, which obliged the Executive Commission to defer the festival to the following Sunday, May 21. On that blessed day, the festival finally took place. Lanterns lined the buildings from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, and floats representing arts and industry were paraded before a huge crowd of onlookers. But *fraternité* was the sentiment most notably absent from the festival. Many Parisians ridiculed the floats and the pageantry, especially deriding the slogans supporting the government. As the Countess d'Agoult notes,

People laughed at the float that depicted agriculture, which the program described as being drawn by oxen with gilded horns. In fact it was pulled by twenty carthorses. They hooted at the five hundred maidens crowned with oak leaves who followed the cart. They jeered at the statue of the Republic with four lions crouched at her feet, and they generally regarded the Festival of Concord as a bad imitation of the Festival of the Supreme Being [which had been staged by Robespierre shortly before his fall from power].<sup>27</sup>

The climax of the festival was to be a huge military review before the new Executive Commission, headed by Lamarine, and the Assembly representatives. But the review miscarried woefully. When the resplendently uniformed National Guards paraded by shouting "Long live the National Assembly!" their fellows in working-class blue blouses (or smocks) responded with the cry: "Long live the democratic and social republic!" Alongside the silent troops of the line marched the strangely unpredictable Mobile Guard, whose political loyalties aroused such concern in Tocqueville.

Thus, within a span of only three months, the veneer of *fraternité* that had existed in February had been replaced by a spirit of furious class hatred. The

liberals had behaved true to form: having patronized the working class when they needed their support against the July Monarchy, they quickly turned against the "blue blouses" once the workers demanded minimal social improvements for themselves and their families. Nor were the bourgeoisie and the notables prepared to permit any modification of the status quo. The pleas of the more decent elements of society—journalists, professionals, and even clerics like the Archbishop of Paris, who was deeply sensitive to the miserable lives of the workers—had no credibility with the employing and privileged classes. It was now apparent that there could be no reconciliation between the possessing and dispossessed classes of society. An explosion was looming on the horizon, one that would be the workers' last attempt to establish a "democratic and social republic" in 1848.

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## NOTES

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14. Sand quoted in Duveau, *Making of a Revolution*, p. 89.
15. Marx, *Class Struggles in France*, p. 65; emphasis in the original. Blanc's evidence about the secret meeting between Blanqui and Lamartine appears in his *Historical Revelations*, pp. 338–42.



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## CHAPTER 28 The Insurrection of June 1848

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Although the immediate cause of the insurrection of June 23 to 26 was the government's decision to terminate the National Workshops, it was a profound underlying class conflict that brought it about. Militant and class conscious, women as well as men, the June insurgents had reached a complete impasse with the Assembly, and they were left with no recourse but to rise up in armed revolt.

In an extraordinary statement that appears to date from June, the workers of the nineteenth brigade of the National Workshops warned the Assembly:

Do not forget, Monarchists, that it was not that we could remain your slaves that we brought about a third revolution. We fought your social system, the sole cause of the disorder and poverty that devours and swallows contemporary society.<sup>1</sup>

The first revolution had overthrown the absolute monarchy in 1789; the second, in 1830, had given rise to a royal constitutional system. In the third, the uprising of February 1848, the workers had hoped to achieve their "democratic and social republic," a hope that had gone unfulfilled because of the usurpers at the Hôtel de Ville. The workers had now exhausted every legal and moral means at their disposal to gain that republic, but the demand for the "third revolution" still persisted—that is, for the historical realization of the promise of the February barricades.

Many, perhaps the majority, of those who rose to complete the "third revolution" of June were essentially demanding basic economic changes, which they regarded as constituting a social republic: the expansion of the National Workshops into cooperatives with state assistance, universal compulsory education, living standards commensurate with their work, and free associations to govern their own economic and political affairs. As a placard on the Porte Saint-Marceau pronounced on June 23, the "democratic and social



republic" was "democratic in that all citizens are electors, . . . social in that all citizens are permitted to form associations for work."<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, among the insurgents, there were undoubtedly many workers with broader social aspirations—socialists and communists, including Fourierists, Saint-Simonians, and Cabetists—who dreamed that the insurrection would usher in the public ownership of property in one form or another. But these men and women were probably a minority. Radical legends to the contrary notwithstanding, many of the insurgents thought of themselves as good republicans, and the tricolor was at least as conspicuous on the barricades as the red flag. Individuals from different walks of life participated in the June Days (even the poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire fought with the insurgents), but it was above all a historic and desperate working-class uprising—the first in revolutionary history.

Indeed, however limited were the immediate goals of the June insurrection, its implications were far broader, and again, no one saw them more clearly than Tocqueville:

What distinguished [the June insurrection], among all the events of this kind which have succeeded one another in France for sixty years, is that it did not aim at changing the form of government, but at altering the order of society. It was not, strictly speaking, a political struggle, in the sense which until then we had given to the word, but a combat of class against class, a sort of Servile War. It represented the facts of the Revolution of February in the same manner as the theories of Socialism represented its ideas; or rather it issued naturally from these ideas, as a son does from his mother. . . .

It must also be observed that this formidable insurrection was not the enterprise of a certain number of conspirators, but the revolt of one whole section of the population against another.<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that the "servile war" that broke out on the barricades of June 23 was overwhelmingly a class war, indeed the first self-conscious and explicit working-class insurrection in history, and it was seen as such by the workers as well as by their opponents. It dissolved the myth of *fraternité*, which the conventional "formal" republicans had emblazoned together with their most sacred claims to *égalité* and *liberté*, and it added to them a right born of the social question. Or as Marx put it: "Only after being dipped in the blood of the June insurgents did the tricolor become the flag of the European revolution—the red flag!"<sup>4</sup>

## "LIVE WORKING OR DIE FIGHTING"

If the workers were trying to achieve a "third revolution," the counter-revolutionary Constituent Assembly was trying to turn back the clock of history to the state of affairs that had existed prior to February 24. How far back they wanted to turn it varied from one Assembly representative to another, a difficulty that sometimes confused the train of events. But the deputies, however much they disagreed with each other, were united in the conviction that the Parisian workers had to be suppressed. First, the Assembly officially disbanded the Luxembourg Commission, although the Luxembourg Labor Assembly continued to exist on its own as an extralegal body under the name *Société des Corporations Réunies*; indeed, adding insult to injury, the Executive Commission proceeded to occupy the Luxembourg Palace for its own sittings.

Once the Luxembourg was out of the way, the remaining clubs and trade corporations were next in line for repression. In the second week of June, Marrast, as mayor of Paris, took systematic steps to close down the corporations as well as the clubs by eliminating their municipally controlled meeting places. "Between June 12 and 16," notes Peter H. Amann,

clubs still meeting in schools, hospitals, asylums, and palaces had their municipal authorization canceled. In some instances they simply found the school building where they met locked and barred. . . . The fact that organized craft workers were being denied public meeting places while employer groups were not, or that a displaced conservative club like the Democratic Club of the National Guard could turn to Marrast for help in finding a new home, lends weight to the charge of class discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, Marrast's restriction was counterproductive from his own perspective because many of the clubs, which had recovered after the repression following May 15, were actually calling upon the workers for restraint. These clubs had constituted an arena for the peaceful expression of working-class grievances, in contrast to open areas such as the Portes Saint-Martin and Saint-Denis, where workers who still congregated during the evenings voiced their anger in more vitriolic phrases, sometimes leading to violent arguments and near riots.

Meanwhile, late in May, behind closed doors, the government had begun its most consequential act of repression: the assault on the National Workshops. The Executive Commission ordered Émile Thomas to "invite" young unmarried male workers to either enlist in the army or be dropped from the Workshops' rolls. Older or married workers who could not "formally prove residence in Paris for six months before May 24" were to be dismissed. Employers, in turn, were free to "requisition any number of employees" from



the Workshops—apparently at whatever wage rates they chose—and a worker's refusal to accept such a job would result in dismissal. The rates, moreover, that the workers were obliged to accept were not hourly wages but piecework rates, which they hated as unduly exploitative. Finally, "brigades of workers" were to be sent to provincial departments, there to engage in "public works under the direction of the Engineers of Bridges and Roads."<sup>6</sup>

Thomas, apparently appalled by the massive transformation in his project, asked that the issuance of the decree be delayed. On May 26, for this insolence, the young director was arrested by the minister of the interior and bundled off to Bordeaux under an armed escort. The explanation given to the public was that Thomas had been assigned to study canals in the provinces. So sudden and surreptitious was this "reassignment" that Thomas was denied any opportunity to visit with or even write to his mother before his departure. The director had, by then, become a thorn in the side of the Executive Commission. Although no friend of Blanc's, Thomas was idealistic and seems to have come around to the Luxembourg's way of thinking about the "organization of labor." Had he remained in Paris, he might even have stirred up the workers. Once he arrived in Bordeaux, the government kept him under surveillance until late June—"a procedure so high-handed," notes Priscilla Robertson, "that Louis-Philippe's police would never have dared to try it."<sup>7</sup> In its arrogance and indifference to the rights of its citizenry, the Second Republic had outdone even the July Monarchy.

Before the decree of the Executive Commission could actually be issued, however, a second assault on the Workshops was being prepared from another governmental quarter: a group of Catholic reactionaries in the Assembly led by Count Falloux, a believer in a theocratic government who had been disposed to defend the Inquisition until political circumstances obliged him to veil his real views in a republican veneer. Falloux now proposed to close down the National Workshops completely, without the elaborate arrangements detailed in the Pentarchy's plan.

Incredibly, Falloux's proposal gained the support of Proudhon, as well as of the naive Victor Hugo. Proudhon later acknowledged that he had behaved like an imbecile, yet the content of the Falloux decree was consistent with his own hatred of doles, which was how he saw the National Workshops; hence his support for the proposal would have been no great departure for him in principle. In any case, the majority of the Assembly rejected Falloux's proposal as too provocative, yet the rejection made little difference to the workers. The proposal had already been widely publicized, and the workers were only too aware that the workshops would be abolished by one means or another.

The measures against the National Workshops, however, could not have occurred at a worse time for the Parisian working class. Their economic straits were now desperate. Not only was a cholera epidemic raging in the city,

afflicting its poorer districts more severely than the wealthier ones, but unemployment had produced a desperate situation. In the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, about two-thirds of the workers were without jobs. Many of them relied entirely on their two-franc wage from the National Workshops to feed their families. Almost three-quarters of the furniture makers in the Faubourg, a very important craft in that area, were without regular work and were faced with outright starvation. These men and women were the most revolutionary people in Paris. Among the most active participants in the February rising, the men were probably the best trained in the use of arms and in street fighting, and later, as members of National Guard legions, National Workshop battalions, clubs, and trade unions, they had grown accustomed to acting with discipline and forethought. When Marrast closed the municipal buildings that had housed their club meetings, the workers of the Saint-Antoine held their own "open-air clubs," as they called them, to listen to orations, engage in debates, and formulate and discuss practical decisions.

In the meantime, the Luxembourg workers and the National Workshops workers, who had formerly been divided against each other, finally recognized their common grievances as a class. On June 18, the extralegal Luxembourg Assembly, led by Pierre Vincard and August Blum, now united with working-class leaders of the National Workshops and issued a joint statement declaring that "nothing is possible now in France but the Democratic and Social Republic."<sup>8</sup> Although their statement was intended to calm the workers, their declaration was doubtless regarded as a challenge to the Constituent Assembly. As Blanc observed, the "three months" grace period that the workers, in February, had given to Lamartine to introduce major social changes "was past!"<sup>9</sup>

Finally, on June 21 the Executive Commission's sweeping decree dissolving the National Workshops was finally issued and published in *Le Moniteur*, producing a sensation among the workers. Crowds gathered throughout the poorer quarters of the city, debating, demonstrating, and slowly gathering into ever larger groups that clearly portended an uprising. Even the reactionary *Le Constitutionnel* belatedly (on June 23) disapproved of the government's handling of the decree.

More effort could have been made, in our view, to prepare opinion for the announcement; more prudence could have been shown. Because the announcement was sudden and because there was a lack of reassuring comment, there is a danger of jeopardizing this decision which has been staved off for so long.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, even if the government had behaved more prudently in dissolving the Workshops, it is extremely unlikely that the result would have been significantly different.



## THE BARRICADES OF JUNE

On Thursday morning, June 22, nearly 300 workers marched toward the Place du Palais-National carrying banners with the insignia "National Workshops" and singing the stirring "*Chant du départ*." Other crowds marched to the Hôtel de Ville, denouncing plans to ship former Workshop workers off to drain the unhealthy marshes of Sologne.

They appear to have chosen a spokesman in the person of a lieutenant from the National Workshops, Louis Pujol. Pujol was an apocalyptic mystic, whose scriptural-sounding *Prophecy of Days of Blood* seemed like a proletarian Book of Revelation. At nine o'clock that morning, he and four working men were delegated to question the Executive Commission about its plans for the workers under the newly published decree. Pujol asked Marie what the government would do if the workers resisted the decree. As Blanc tells the story, Marie responded that

"The workmen ... who do not submit to the decree will be sent out of Paris by force."...

The reply of M. Pujol ... was as follows: "Citizen Representatives, you insult men invested with a sacred character as delegates of the people; we withdraw with the profound conviction that you neither desire the organisation of labor, nor the prosperity of the French people."<sup>11</sup>

By late afternoon, after the story of the interchange had circulated, thousands of workers from all parts of the city gravitated toward the Place du Panthéon and assembled there by torchlight, in great agitation. As if to add even greater drama to the event, the dark sky flashed with lightning and resounded with thunder. At the Palais Bourbon, Blanc could hear one continuous chant: "*Du pain ou du plomb!*" (Bread or lead!) By nine o'clock, according to police reports, the crowd before the Panthéon numbered in the tens of thousands. Pujol told the newly arrived workers what Marie had said and called upon them to swear vengeance, which they solemnly did. On the initiative of radical National Guards from the Twelfth Legion, they agreed to return to the Panthéon at six the next morning, Friday, June 23.

Despite the inclement weather, a huge crowd gathered again at the Place du Panthéon the next morning. There, at Pujol's direction, they marched with grave determination through the rain to the Place de la Bastille, their numbers swelling along the way. At the site where the Bastille had been besieged some sixty years before, the great mass of men and women uncovered their heads and kneeled in homage to the revolutionary heroes and heroines who had fallen on July 14, 1789. Then, breaking up into columns and groups, they scattered to all the working-class neighborhoods and began to build barricades.

Over the next few days more than a 1000 barricades were built, according to a count made after the hostilities came to an end. They were concentrated mainly in the northeast, in the traditional working-class areas of Paris: the Faubourgs Saint-Martin, du Temple, and Poissonnière, extending into the heights of Montmartre; the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and the Place de la Bastille. But others sprang up in the Faubourg du Panthéon, the Latin Quarter, and Gentilly in the south; and in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques and the Cité in the center—with its well-guarded prize, the Hôtel de Ville. Thirty-eight were erected in the Rue Saint-Jacques alone, and nearly thirty along the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

Although many of them were little more than tentative barriers to obstruct the movement of the government's troops, a large number were imposing structures, in some cases reaching as high as fifteen feet, with portholes for muskets, strongly reinforced by bulky objects, even trams and wagons. Tocqueville marveled at the workers' meticulousness in preparing their defenses:

In all the little streets surrounding [the Hôtel de Ville], I found people engaged in making barricades; they proceeded in their work with the cunning and regularity of an engineer, not unpaving more stones than were necessary to lay the foundations of a very thick, solid and even neatly-built wall, in which they generally left a small opening by the side of the houses to permit of ingress and egress.<sup>12</sup>

The grim determination, self-discipline, and courage with which the Parisian workers set about their task is attested by virtually all honest observers on both sides of this desperate social war. Walking along the right bank of the Seine at four o'clock on the afternoon of June 23, Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary exile, noticed that as "the shops were shutting, columns of the National Guard with sinister faces were marching in different directions." A bell sounded from Saint-Sulpice, summoning the workers to arms.

On the other side of the river, barricades were being thrown up in all the streets and alleys. I can see now those gloomy figures dragging the stones, women and children helping them. A young Polytechnic student climbed one barricade that apparently was finished, unfurled the flag and began singing the Marseillaise in a mournfully solemn voice, all who were working joined in, and the chorus of the grand song resounding over the stones of the barricades made the heart throb. . . . The alarm bell still rang out. Meanwhile, there was the thud of artillery over the bridge, and General Beguet on the bridge scanned through a field-glass the enemy's position.<sup>13</sup>



A coalescence was taking place among the crowds roaming around the capital, chanting slogans that grimly vowed to resist the government's decrees and policies. Had any coordinated leadership created this coalescence? Certainly various organizations spoke for various strata within the working population, such as the Union of Brigadiers of the National Workshops and the now-semimilitary *Société des Droits de l'Homme*, which lived on memories of the great *journées* of 1792-93. But there was no overall plan for an insurrection, and no guiding military strategy or organization—still less a party that had a strategy for taking over the government. With their ablest leaders jailed in the Vincennes, the workers rose up mainly on their own, and local militants—usually men with military training, such as insurgent National Guards—provided them with leadership. Every serious account of the June insurrection indicates that the insurgents acted with extraordinary spontaneity and ingenuity. Tocqueville notes that they “fought without a war-cry, without leaders, without flags, and yet with a marvellous harmony and an amount of military experience that astonished the oldest officers.”<sup>14</sup> About half of the insurgents seem to have been National Workshop workers.

Within a given street or its environs, the spontaneous coordination of the workers was astonishing. Women and children took over noncombative tasks, such as repairing damaged barricades, provisioning supplies and water for the combatants, caring for the wounded, and the like. Each neighborhood tried to cast lead and zinc bullets for its fighters, and to produce black gunpowder—often compelling reluctant local chemists to help them. But even as the neighborhoods coordinated their activities peacefully and efficiently, no coordination existed between the *quartiers* or even between barricades only a few streets distant. In its structure, the insurrection almost seemed a matter of individual neighborhoods rising up, rather than large sections of the city as a whole. As Blanc tells us,

This insurrection, so general in its causes and in its spirit, assumed at almost every point the character of a local protest. In many districts, the inhabitants reserved to themselves exclusively the guard of their own barricades, rejected the assistance of strangers, and after closing all access to their streets, refused to cooperate in the general attack.<sup>15</sup>

Even barricades that could have easily spared men commonly refused to send them to support insurgents in other faubourgs who were being hard pressed by government troops.

This orientation was not the result of myopia, or of a failure to understand that the fate of each barricade depended ultimately on the fate of all. It was due in great part to recent radical history, as Amann notes, which associated coordination and strategy with failure, as exemplified by impotent conspirators

like Barbès and Blanqui and with the abortive conspiracies of secret societies like the *Saisons*.

Successful revolutions, on the contrary, were assumed to be spontaneous (and therefore unplannable) upheavals of the masses—witness July 1789, July 1830, and February 1848. By June 1848 everyone foresaw violence, widespread popular violence provoked by a hostile government. But no revolutionary organization dreamed that it could control the direction, intensity, and timing of that violence.<sup>16</sup>

The insurgents, fearing any degree of coordination that might demand even a modest sacrifice of local autonomy, veered to the extreme of almost pure spontaneity and independent decision-making. This highly anarchistic mentality was to make the uprising disastrously vulnerable to attacks by the government and its troops, which carefully coordinated its strategy on a citywide scale. The June insurgents seemed unwilling to take conscious control of the coming storm and draw up plans for dealing with it on a wider scale so that their uprising, while retaining considerable local flexibility, could make systematic headway against the well-disciplined troops that confronted them. This fetishization of untempered localism and spontaneity sealed the fate of the insurrection.

Nevertheless, for a time the question of whether the government would be able to hold Paris at all was very much in question. The Mobile Guard, the army, and the bourgeois units of the National Guard were placed under the command of General Eugène Cavaignac, who had acquired a reputation for ferocity in campaigns against Algerian tribesmen. Cavaignac decided not to attack the insurgents or obstruct their barricade building until he had completely equipped and massed his own troops. As a result of his inaction, on Friday, fully half of Paris fell into the hands of the insurgents.

Tocqueville, amazed that the army had permitted this to happen, asked General Lamoricière why his troops had not engaged the insurgents.

"What are you doing?" I asked him. "They have already been fighting at the Porte Saint-Denis, and barricades are being built all round the Hôtel de Ville."

"Patience," he replied, "we are going there. Do you think we are such fools as to scatter our soldiers on such a day as this over the small streets of the suburbs? No, no! we shall let the insurgents concentrate in the quarters which we can't keep them out of, and then we will go and destroy them. They sha'n't escape us this time."<sup>17</sup>

Shrewdly, Cavaignac aimed to avoid a guerrilla war against numerous elusive bands of workers. In such fighting, in the capital's intricate streets and alleys,



even his well-disciplined troops would clearly have been at a disadvantage. Rather, he preferred to corral as many of the insurgents as he could into fixed positions that could be easily encircled and fight them like one field army opposing another, striking annihilating blows against a relatively small number of well-defended positions.

Despite their desperation, the insurgents behaved with exemplary decency, respecting the well-being and property of people whose neighborhoods they occupied. They committed no serious crimes; even jewelry shops remained untouched, and Victor Hugo could report that although his house was searched, probably for arms and ammunition, all his personal belongings remained in place, including his manuscript for *Les Misérables*. The workers were eager to show that they were not the riff-raff that their enemies had depicted them as being. They continued to collect the usual taxes at the city's tollgates, permit anyone to use the semaphore telegraph (as long as they did not report on the battle), and even set free a number of prisoners, who were duly permitted to cover their uniforms with workmen's blouses.

## THE FOUR DAYS

At around ten o'clock on Friday morning, June 23, Cavaignac finally put his troops into action, starting a conflict that lasted until Monday, June 26, when the last barricade in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine was taken. For much of that time, the insurgents held their own, with astonishing boldness, against substantially larger and better-equipped military forces. Barricades were taken and retaken as the fighting surged and ebbed furiously in the squares, boulevards, and narrow streets.

As described by the novelist and Assembly member Victor Hugo, the first skirmish took place at a barricade near the Porte Saint-Denis. When the loyalist National Guards ordered its defenders to surrender, the barricade fighters responded by opening fire, killing thirty Guards. Soon "a young woman, beautiful, disheveled, and terrible" climbed to the top of the barricade.

The girl, who was a woman of the streets, hoisted her skirts up to her waist and yelled at the National Guards, "Cowards, fire, if you dare, at the belly of a woman." A volley of fire hurled the unfortunate creature down. She gave a loud scream and fell. Immediately, a second woman appeared. This one was younger and lovelier still, little more than a child, seventeen at most. She too was a woman of the streets. Like the other she showed her stomach and screamed, "Fire brigands!" They fired and she fell, riddled with bullets, on the body of the first.<sup>18</sup>

The novelist's judgment that the women were prostitutes may well have been the product of a middle-class prejudice, but his account decidedly reveals the incredible courage and bravery of the insurgents.

To reconquer the city, Cavaignac divided his forces into three columns, sending the first and largest, under the command of General Lamoricière, into the heart of the insurgent center, between the Faubourg Poissonnière and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. It made slow progress and encountered such furious resistance that at least part of the column had to retreat. The second column, under General Bedeau, was dispatched to relieve the troops at the Hôtel de Ville, which the insurgents had nearly succeeded in capturing. The third, commanded by General Damesme, was ordered into the Left Bank to march toward the Panthéon and take the twelfth *arrondissement*.

Surrounded by mazes of barricades, the three columns were soon isolated from each other, easy prey to insurgent sniper fire. As the city settled down to a relatively quiet night, the commanders were obliged to hold a council of war to reassess their strategy, while the insurgents repaired existing barricades and built new ones.

On the second day, Saturday, the fighting was bloody and inconclusive but generally went even better for the insurgents than it had the day before. The government's attempts to take the northern districts met with more failures than successes. The insurgents captured the local city halls (*mairies*) of the eighth and ninth *arrondissements*, coming within striking distance of the Hôtel de Ville. Indeed, after expelling the eighth *arrondissement* mayor, the seemingly ubiquitous Victor Hugo, they set up a revolutionary government in its place. Here the able leadership of Léon Lacollonge, the president of the club named *L'Organisation du travail* and editor of its eponymous newspaper, was essential, organizing the efforts of the members of the Club des Antonins. The revolutionary government issued a manifesto calling for a "social and democratic Republic; Free association of Labour, aided by the State; the impeachment of the Representatives of the People and of the ministers, . . . the immediate arrest of the Executive Commission," and "the removal of troops from Paris."<sup>19</sup> Only the Mobile Guards, on the Left Bank in the Panthéon area, made significant progress for the government. Their political loyalties were no longer indeterminate—they fought eagerly on behalf of the generals. Meanwhile the Assembly used the uncertain military situation—what it called a "state of siege"—to unseat Lamartine and the rest of the Pentarchy and to make Cavaignac dictator, endowing him with extraordinary powers to crush the insurrection.

The third day, Sunday, started out badly for the government troops once again, when Lamoricière's forces failed to make any advances against the insurgents in the northern sector. Nor could the army, at first, dislodge the insurgents from the eighth *arrondissement*. But by the late afternoon, the captured *mairie* had fallen to regular army troops, and the tide of battle turned



against the insurgents. In vigorous fighting supported by artillery, government forces overcame the barricades in nearly every district, leaving only the Bastille and the Place du Trône in insurgent hands. Meanwhile, on Sunday night, eager National Guards from the provinces flocked into Paris in great numbers. (Apart from Marseilles, most other French cities, including Lyon, remained quiet during the June insurrection.) As a result of the railroads, Tocqueville notes, it was possible to bring rural Guards—mainly young nobles, shopkeepers, and peasants—from distances of about a 150 miles to the capital only a day after the fighting had begun. By Monday morning, June 26, the defeat of the insurrection was imminent. Troops were closing in on the Place de Bastille and the Place du Trône, while insurgent resistance in other pockets of the city had become sporadic. At some barricades the insurgents fought to the last, but most of the remaining workers, owing partly to spurious promises by the army of an honorable surrender, laid down their muskets. The Faubourg Saint-Antoine was the last holdout, but finally it too surrendered.

Apart from General Bedeau, who earnestly tried to negotiate an honorable surrender with the insurgents, and General Duvivier, who expressed genuine compassion for the material plight of the workers as he lay dying from his wounds, there is no evidence that the bourgeois National Guard or the Mobile Guard felt any sympathy for their opponents. The regular soldiers, by contrast, seem to have fought with no strong conviction, and in all likelihood some individual Guards acted with a modicum of decency toward their insurgent captives. But the nearly crazed young Mobile Guards killed workers as wantonly as they had risked their lives in battle. To these "children" of the working class, a battle was a festival, and they killed members of their own class without remorse.

The behavior of the Mobile Guards has always been a puzzle to historians of the Revolution. Marx dismissed them as members of the lumpenproletariat, whose services were for sale to any purchaser, but this view, as recent research has shown, can no longer be supported. In fact, their occupational background closely parallels that of Parisian workers as a whole. Recruited from the February barricades, their working-class identity seems to have been dissolved into a strictly military identity, reinforced by decent pay, strict training, isolation, and above all a strong *esprit de corps*. By June, their sense of belonging was to a corps rather than to a class. As for their ardor, it is perhaps more explicable by their youth—their average age was about twenty-one—than by any social or political convictions.

By contrast, the National Guards who fought for the government functioned as the armed force of a class—specifically, merchants, retailers, professionals, some artisans, and outright capitalists—for whom the defeat of the insurgents would be a victory over "communism." Unlike the Mobile Guard units, however, a number of National Guard units, especially from the eastern sector

of Paris, did defect to the insurgents, while others were politically ambivalent and therefore untrustworthy in the eyes of their officers.

The workers who fought on the barricades were nothing if not bold. They certainly numbered no more than 50,000—that is to say, barely a quarter of the more than 200,000 male workers in Paris. Against them were arrayed at least an equal or greater number of well-trained and well-equipped troops of all kinds, supported by devastating artillery, with provincial forces flowing into the capital to support them. In fact, the willingness of these forces to slaughter as many of the defeated Parisian workers as they could is a shocking testimony to the provincial hatred of Paris—or to rural idiocy.

Partly as a result of the provincial infusion, the June insurrection became one of the bloodiest of all Parisian *journées*. Statistics on the number of insurgents who were killed vary widely. Some claim that only 1500 workers were killed in all, including about 150 insurgent prisoners. But contemporary accounts make this overall figure difficult to accept. The most plausible toll comes from Georges Duveau:

Only four or five hundred of the rebels appear to have perished on the barricades, but more than three thousand were massacred by the soldiers of the *garde mobile* and the regular army after the fighting was over. In all, 11,671 persons were arrested. A few of these were executed and some were sentenced to forced labor, but by far the most common penalty was deportation [to Algeria].<sup>20</sup>

Alexander Herzen, the famous Russian revolutionary, witnessed the June uprising with his family, noting the brutality of the counterrevolution in his diary:

On the evening of the 26th of June, after the victory of the Nationale over Paris, we heard shots being fired at short regular intervals. . . . We glanced at one another, all our faces were livid. . . . "They are shooting prisoners," we said with one voice, and turned away from one another. I pressed my forehead against the window-pane. Such moments provoke ten years of hatred, a lifetime of revenge: woe to him who forgives at such moments!<sup>21</sup>

And according to Louis Blanc:

Prisoners were being shot in the plain of Grenelle, at the Montparnasse Cemetery, in the racecourse of Montmartre. Prisoners were being shot in the Place du Panthéon. Prisoners were being shot at the Cloister of St. Benedict and in the court of the Hôtel de Cluny. A wounded rebel was stretched on a bed of straw. Some monsters fired it and burnt the dying man alive.<sup>22</sup>



The Luxembourg Gardens had to be closed until rain could wash away the blood of the unknown number of prisoners who had been executed there.

## THE AFTERMATH OF JUNE

Histories of 1848, the most revolutionary year of the entire nineteenth century, usually recount, in addition to the events in Paris, the revolutionary upheavals that occurred in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere in Europe. But it was above all in France that the revolution's aims went far beyond the nationalistic goals that marked other insurgencies, as a revolution made in the name of universal principles. In this sense the June insurrection in Paris marks both the beginning of the revolutionary year and its finale.

Even after the June uprising, however, insurgencies of workers and even peasants continued in other parts of France for a few more years. The most important urban working-class uprising of 1849 occurred in Lyon, which was the silk-producing center of Europe.

Predominantly artisanal in its production methods, Lyon had begun to seriously feel the impact of commercial capitalism almost a century earlier, when the silk trade had been taken over by merchants who distributed jobs and bought the produce of master craftsmen and journeymen—many of whom yearned for the guild-type corporate society that had existed before the Great Revolution. In 1831, the silk-weaving artisans, or *canuts*, rose in armed conflict to gain a better tariff, or contract, from the merchants. For a brief time they actually took control of the city, under red and black flags—which made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of revolutionary symbols. Their use of the word *mutuellisme* to denote the associative disposition of society that they preferred made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of anarchist thought as well, since Proudhon appears to have picked up the word from them during his brief stay in the city in 1843-44 to describe his own essentially contractual vision of a just society.

In 1834, the Lyon *canuts* rose once again—this time led mainly by the journeymen rather than the master weavers—to gain better working conditions both from the merchants and from their employers. This short-lived revolt probably inspired a republican uprising in Paris in the same year. In 1848, however, although the silk workers were the target of considerable socialistic and communistic propaganda, the June insurrection in Paris did not provoke a corresponding uprising in Lyon. Whatever revolutionary sympathy the *canuts* might have felt for their Parisian fellow workers was undermined by the local government's carrot-and-stick policy of permitting the clubs to continue to meet while blanketing the city with troops—and the clubists were not eager to suffer

the repression inflicted upon their counterparts in Paris. In the main, the preoccupation of many canuts with harmless cooperatives absorbed much of their energy, leaving the city's political sphere in the hands of moderates and outright reactionaries.

Meanwhile, in the Paris of June 1848, once the smoke and debris had been cleared away and the shattered bodies removed from the barricades, the Revolution began a journey backward, from its "red" peaks, over its republican plain, and ultimately back down toward its monarchical swamp, made even more odious by the presence of a Bonapartist adventurer whose "repulsive face" (in Marx's words) was covered with the "iron mask" of the original emperor.

General Cavaignac's brief dictatorship—technically a "state of siege"—remained in force all summer, until October 29. In July a decree was issued permitting clubs to meet—but only under conditions that prevented any significant political activity. Any club that wished to meet had to provide the police with a "declaration" of its intention twenty-four hours in advance. Club members could engage in discussions only under the surveillance of "a judicial or administrative official"—that is, the police—and they had to desist from talking about "any proposition contrary to public order or public morality." After the meeting the club had to hand over to the police a summary of the meeting's actions and discussions and provide a list of the members in attendance. It also had to provide "reports, addresses and all other communications between clubs." The organization of "secret societies," of course, was strictly forbidden.<sup>23</sup> The decree, in fact, struck at the very heart of one of the workers' most basic demands: the right to form associations. Revolutionary organizers were now obliged to go underground, where they had so often been since the Bourbon Restoration.

Additionally, Cavaignac required newspapers, in order to continue publishing, to deposit caution money (*cautionnement*) to guarantee their future "good conduct"—that is, to guarantee that they would avoid publishing politically offensive articles, such as those that discussed a "social republic" or criticized the government. This was a revival of Louis-Philippe's hated policy of suppressing dissident literature. In 1848 the *cautionnements* imposed were so high (up to 24,000 francs) that only papers like the conservative *Constitutionnel* could afford to pay. Finally, the ten-hour day was raised to twelve hours, returning the workers to the workday that existed before the February barricades. As the reactionary *Mémorial bordelais* put it, "France needs moral order and material order, and any force determined to provide her with both is entitled to the sympathy and collaboration of right-thinking men."<sup>24</sup> The Party of Order had openly emerged, not as an organization but as a coalition of Legitimists, Orleanists, and complete reactionaries—deputies and notables who would not have dared breathe a word about their views three months earlier.



In opposition there developed a coalition of diverse leftists, notably socialists and radical republicans who shifted increasingly to the left, as the "state of seige" became more repressive. Their numbers included the left-republican representatives in the Assembly, as well as militants who inhabited what was once the thriving club scene and who remained in the much-curtailed clubs and societies. They were collectively known as *démoc-socs*, for democratic socialists, or interchangeably as *Montagnards*. Their political program centered on demands for a social as well as democratic republic. "The political problem is no longer the problem of the future," even *La Réforme*—the liberal republican newspaper having moved to the left—declared in August, "A new problem has come to the fore, and democracy has had to emblazon its banner with the words: 'The democratic and social Republic.'"<sup>25</sup> Despite the "caution" laws, the *démoc-socs* managed to generate a huge amount of propaganda—political pamphlets, brochures, satirical engravings—with which they flooded the provinces, shipping it out by any means they could, including the sending of agitators to small towns and villages in all parts of France.

Moreover, despite the repression of strikes and the working-class political activity that followed the June insurrection—or perhaps because of it—the militant French workers took refuge in associationism. Producers' associations and various mutual aid and cooperative activities were still legally permitted as economic and commercial enterprises, and they now proliferated in Paris and nearly all the cities of France. The fortunes of these associations changed with the shifting political moods of the Constituent Assembly: a Union of Associations was established in November 1849, embracing 104 member associations, that planned to provide credit and open channels for commercial exchange between its component entities. In May 1850, before the Union could carry out its plan to issue bonds toward these ends, a panicked government raided its headquarters, jailed its leaders, and made it illegal.

In Paris alone, an estimated 300 workers' associations of various kinds emerged, in 120 trades with about 50,000 people. A typical association was open to any member of a trade who could make a nominal investment in its capital funds and was guided by the principles that had been outlined by Buchez and the producers' cooperatives represented in the Luxembourg Labor Assembly.

In the years that followed, these associations failed to establish a cooperative and egalitarian system. More often than not, associations that could compete successfully with privately owned enterprises were those that became capitalistic themselves. Even those with the best intentions had to join the capitalist system as collective capitalistic enterprises, if only to remain viable. One of the most successful such enterprises was the association established by a group of Parisian masons in 1848, with shares valued at fifty-five francs apiece, and with visions of freeing all construction workers from wage labor. By 1852 these visions were all but dead, but the association was so successful

economically that the value of its shares had soared to 3,000 francs each, and it finally closed its doors to new members. To meet the needs of its expanding operations, it hired 1,600 wage earners. To complete its capitalistic turn, during the masons' strike of 1866, it took the side of the employers against the strikers.

Another problem that producers' associations faced were the difficulties arising from the conditions of dire material scarcity in which they existed. Mismanagement, disputes over distributions of earnings, desultory attitudes toward work obligations, and even theft became cardinal problems in keeping the associations alive. As Bernard Moss observes:

For most associations life was hard and short. Lacking credit and customers, many were also beset with administrative problems and disputes. Elected managers did not always possess the requisite managerial and commercial skills. Internal disputes over managerial authority and the distribution of earnings often led to the dismissal of managers and exclusion and resignation of members. [Of those for which there are records], most remained marginal operations, comprising fewer members in 1851 than when they began. . . . Of forty-nine trades that started associations in 1849, only twenty-six had them in 1851. Since new ones were constantly being created, there were still 200 in that year.<sup>26</sup>

Understandably, workers in producers' associations did not expect to receive the low wages that masters and capitalists typically paid; nor was the working class in an economic position to purchase the consumer goods produced by the associations, when associations tried to equalize the incomes of their members by raising their prices. No amount of ethical commitment or working-class solidarity could override the rumblings of empty stomachs.

But, in the end, it was the tugging and pushing of market forces which worked against the socialistic aspirations of the producers' associations, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, workers' credit institutions, and the like, and made it impossible for them to succeed in ending competition or replacing the hard core of the capitalist entrepreneurial and market system with a cooperative and egalitarian one, let alone with their vision of a socialistic society. The most the associations could finally hope to accomplish was to ease the working conditions of their artisan members, establishing federations of producers' associations and reasonably endowed credit institutions through which the more successful enterprises could assist those in difficulty. But even this was something the government was not prepared to let them do on a large scale. Louis Bonaparte suppressed most workers' associations when he became emperor, although in the 1860s the empire began to encourage a number of them (often with the aid of the more tepid Proudhonists). During the 1860s, too, to curry favor with the workers, even Orleanists, not to be outdone by Bonapartists and moderate



republicans, established their own cooperative-oriented bank. Clearly, the state had nothing to fear from the associationist movement; however large and mutualistic they became, associations could never have supplanted the capitalist and market system that was gaining increasing command over the French economy. Blanc's associationist vision could have led only to a slowed entry of the industrial system into France and a mitigation of its worst abuses. But in no sense could it have replaced the capitalist system in France.

## "THE LITTLE NAPOLEON"

In September a by-election finally injected a Bonaparte into the Assembly where, with appropriate modesty, he betrayed no inkling of any aspirations to greater power. "Napoleon le petit" ("the little Napoleon," as Victor Hugo called him) was the son of Napoleon's brother, Louis Bonaparte. Following the early death of Napoleon's own son, Louis Napoleon had become head of the Bonaparte family, and with it he inherited all the Napoleonic pretensions that came with the name. His youth had been spent in Switzerland and Germany—like all Bonaparte notables, he spoke French with a foreign accent—after which he drifted to Italy and then France, where a comic attempt at insurrection obliged him to seek exile in the United States and England. The "prince," as he was known to his supporters, returned to France as a "citizen" rather than as a pretender to the throne, and his ability to hold his tongue, to listen politely, and to behave almost demurely earned him support among the more guiltless deputies of the Assembly, including Hugo and Proudhon. Having been in exile during the most hectic events of 1848, including the June Days, Louis—unlike the liberals who had so abjectly failed the workers—appeared untarnished and almost virginal politically. When it became apparent that his presence as an Assembly representative was an embarrassment to nearly all factions in the government, he politely withdrew from the Constituent Assembly and seemed to hold his peace, although no one could forget that he was waiting in the wings.

Prince Louis prudently steered a course between all of the contending classes in France—a policy that was to be called Bonapartism—concentrating his efforts on restoring the Bonaparte dynasty and its fortunes. Indeed, the essence of his success was his ability to seem to be everything to everybody. To the workers, who began to vote for him in droves, he professed an interest in socialism, even a willingness to make the rich pay the expenses of the government. To the bourgeoisie and notables, he promised order and an intention to discipline the masses, particularly the working class. As for the peasants, they associated him with the original Napoleon, who had

consolidated the gains of the Great Revolution on their behalf against feudal exactions. In fact, the forty-five-centime tax that had so infuriated the peasantry encouraged a revival of the mystique of Napoléon le grand, who had once provided the French with la gloire, internal stability, and decisive if authoritarian leadership. The original Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz was remembered far more vividly than the terrible losses suffered by the Grand Army in its retreat from Moscow.

Meanwhile the Constituent Assembly had written a constitution for the torn and mutilated nation, which it finally proclaimed on November 21, 1848. It established the office of president, but in an effort to fend off the possible reemergence of monarchy, it stipulated that the president could not be reelected after the expiration of his single four-year term. It also created a single-chamber Legislative Assembly that, like the president, was to be elected by universal adult male suffrage. Nearly everyone could see that the constitution would inevitably self-destruct, since the authors had failed to establish any way in which the two branches of government could possibly adjudicate their differences in the event of a serious clash of authority.

Finally, on December 10, 1848, the nation went to the polls to elect the officials to inhabit this governmental structure—and the vast majority of Frenchmen seemed to want to take their revenge on the nearly moribund Second Republic. Of the three men of national stature who ran for the presidency, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte received 5.5 million votes out of 7.5 cast. His most important opponent, General Cavaignac, the darling of the moderate republicans, received only 1.5 million, and Lamartine, a humiliating 18,000. A Bonaparte—Louis Napoleon—was now president of the French Republic.

In the meantime, the Left was still an active presence in France. In anticipation of elections for Assembly representatives in May 1849, the Montagnards and démoc-socs went to work in earnest, holding banquets, creating electoral alliances, and offering joint candidacies for the Assembly. The country was sharply polarized politically. As *Le National* summarized it: "Today there are only two parties left in Europe—the Party of Revolution and the party of counter-Revolution. . . . The days for middle-of-the-road policies and hesitation have passed."<sup>17</sup> Although the May election results packed the Palais Bourbon with monarchists—nearly two-thirds of them Legitimists—it also constituted a victory for the Left by returning 150 Montagnard representatives, a proportion that surpassed that of the moderates. The center was beginning to wither away, its constituents drifting to the Right or to the Left—a characteristic feature of a growing political crisis.

Meanwhile in Rome, a revolutionary republic, inspired by the French example, had emerged in February 1849, as a result of what was "the nearest thing to a social revolution in 1848 outside France." Although the republic was presided over by the romantic republican nationalist Mazzini, it made social



advances as well, particularly weakening the power of the Church: the carriages of cardinals, whose red robes were said to be the blood of the poor, were overturned and set ablaze; the offices of the Holy Inquisition were converted to housing for the poor; and most significantly, some of the landholdings of the Church were confiscated and distributed to the peasants as leaseholds. "Rome and Venice," says Robertson, "were the only places in Europe that dared to carry their revolutions to the very limit set by France."<sup>28</sup>

The Pope, horrified by this state of affairs, called upon Catholic France for assistance, and Louis Napoleon, who was courting the support of the Church and of French Catholics generally, was only too happy to come to his aid. Five months after the declaration of the Roman Republic, on April 30, he sent a French expeditionary force south to Rome, there to crush the insurgency.

Even the moderate Republicans in the Assembly exploded at this outrage. This use of military force was a violation not only of the Assembly's wishes but of the constitution itself, which obliged the president to gain the Assembly's consent before using the army abroad. On June 11, Ledru-Rollin—the last prominent, ostensibly republican leader in France—tried to bring a bill of impeachment against the president and his ministers. The next day the majority Party of Order placidly rejected this defense of its own constitutional power, in what can only have been an act of provocation against the Left. The Montagnards fell for it and stormed out of the Assembly in petulant protest—a fatal tactic that left the government entirely in the hands of the Left's opponents in the midst of a major crisis.

Two days later the Montagnards proclaimed that the government was "outside the Constitution," and on June 13 they organized a peaceful demonstration to protest the Roman expedition. Thirty thousand people participated, mainly unarmed National Guards, as well as middle-class republicans and members of the workers' secret societies, marching collectively to the cry of "Long live the Constitution!" But awaiting the demonstrators at the end of the Rue de la Paix were the dragoons and chasseurs of General Changarnier, who swiftly scattered the crowd into the side streets. The more resolute Montagnards and workers tried to make an armed stand at the Museum of Arts and Trades, but it collapsed miserably when the National Guard failed to support them. Where the workers in the June 1848 insurrection had called for the "organization of work" under the slogan "bread or lead"—that is, for basic demands of the working class—the demonstration of June 1849 raised the formal republican demands of the middle classes. Or as Marx observed: "If June 23, 1848, was the insurrection of the revolutionary proletariat, June 13, 1849, was the insurrection of the democratic petty bourgeois, each of these two insurrections being the classically pure expression of the class which had been its vehicle."<sup>29</sup> It marked the definitive defeat of the Left in French politics for more than a decade. The government used the

occasion to declare a state of siege, pass a new law that banned the clubs completely, and tighten the press laws still further, until no paper more radical than *Le National* could appear. As repression dragged the Revolution backward, the "leaders" of the June 13 demonstration were tried, and the jails were filled with Montagnards and real or suspected socialists.

When news of the events in Paris reached Lyon, together with the news that the French army had been used against the Roman republicans, insurgency once again stirred the city. The Lyonnais rose in insurrection on June 14, 1849, erecting barricades and raiding gun shops, but the well-organized line troops of the government and particularly their artillery put an end to the uprising in only two days. As a historian of the revolt observes:

The carrot-and-stick approach of encouraging economic dependence and discouraging political opposition, initiated under the Second Republic and elaborated under the Second Empire [of Louis Bonaparte], seemed to have extinguished the radical movement of Lyon.<sup>30</sup>

The prince-president now made a tour of the provinces, drumming up support for his administration and, above all, himself, while the Legislative Assembly, completely controlled by Party of Order, prepared to restrict the franchise. On May 31, 1850, the Assembly disenfranchised some three million voters, mainly mobile workers who would have voted for the *démocrates*, by requiring evidence of a three-year residence in a given electoral constituency. It also enacted an educational "reform," proposed by the overzealous Falloux, that granted considerable power to the Church in the schools, while adherents of the prince-president circulated petitions to allow him to run for a second presidential term, again in flat violation of the constitution.

Bonaparte had garnered wide popular support among the peasants, and he had even lured many workers into his camp by calling for a return of exiled June insurgents and a restoration of universal suffrage. So confident was he of popular support that he now felt that he could dissolve the Assembly. On the fateful night of December 1, 1851, assured of the army's aid and the quiescence of the Parisian workers, he arrested the major Assembly leaders and ordered the military to occupy the Palais Bourbon. In a proclamation the next day, December 2, justifying this coup d'état, he condemned the Assembly for being "a hot-bed of sedition," for "forging weapons for civil war," indeed, for "making a bid for the power which I wield directly by virtue of the people's will."<sup>31</sup> Louis Bonaparte, in effect, accused the Assembly of damaging the very constitution that he himself was in the process of jettisoning.

Police accounts report that, amid cries of "To arms!" barricades went up in the Rue Rambuteau, at the intersection of the Rue Saint-Denis and the Rue Saint-Martin. But by December 4, the army could laconically report: "Paris is



quiet. The barricades that were erected last night were removed without difficulty."<sup>32</sup> A staff captain of the National Guard tried to account for the lack of resistance to the coup:

the unpopularity of the chamber, the surprise and the remarkable way the arrests were timed to take place at the same moment—the attitude of the army, too, perhaps—meant that in the end nothing very nasty happened. . . . You know, moreover, that those gentlemen [the deputies] were arrested without any show of resistance. . . . Among the workers—indifference, almost approbation.<sup>33</sup>

Even Lyon, which had risen on March 13 of the previous year, made virtually no effort to resist the prince-president's coup, and reports from other provincial cities suggest that they had been awaiting news of resistance in Paris before undertaking it themselves.

It was mainly in more remote southern areas, such as Provence, that serious resistance to the coup occurred. Ever since June 1848, Montagnard and démocrat agitators had been working hard to loosen the grasp of extreme conservatism on the French peasants. They succeeded, to a great extent, fulfilling Blanqui's hopes from the spring of 1848 that the peasants, given enough time, could become receptive to the new political ideas. In fact, they had learned about the democratic-socialist ideas that had been popular in the Parisian neighborhoods and clubs of 1848, and they proved to be even more responsive than the Parisian workers could have expected. Peasants in about thirteen departments, particularly in southern and central France, actually took up arms in support of the Republic against Bonaparte and embattled themselves with the superior forces of the government.

But the regime struck back swiftly and effectively: approximately 27,000 people were arrested or prosecuted *in absentia*, of whom some 15,000 were sentenced to imprisonment and 9,000 deported. Many of the workers' associations, including trade unions, were closed down. After two plebiscites (on December 21, 1851, and November 21, 1852) staged by Napoleon le petit, France became an empire, if nothing else than in name, and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte an emperor. In much of France, the events of 1848-49 faded from collective memory, opening two decades of mediocrity and banality in French history.

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## CHAPTER 29 Reaction and Revival

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Even as Louis Napoleon brought the Revolution of 1848 to a definitive end in France, the high hopes that swept over Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, and even the Slavic countries under Turkish and Austrian rule were smothered by counterrevolution and the triumph of reaction. Dreams of a unified Germany and Italy, a sovereign Hungary, a constitutional monarchy in Austria, and independent Czech, Slovak, and south Slav nations were effaced by a renewal of authoritarian rule, press censorship, increased surveillance, the arrest of countless nationalists and republicans, and the fading of social ideals. Throughout the 1850s the French, Prussian, Austrian, and Russian governments unrelentingly persecuted their domestic radicals, suppressing their writings and lectures, censoring their press, and honeycombing their meetings with police and spies when they did not execute, jail, or exile them. The dark cloud of repression settled over the continent, instilling listlessness in the masses and despair among their leaders.

Blanqui, convicted for his participation in the May 15 *journée*, spent ten years in prison, often under unbearable conditions. Cooped up with his rival Barbès in the penitentiary of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, his futile attempts at escape from their mutual harassment resulted in transfers to even more punitive dungeons. A forgiving Louis Napoleon finally pardoned the innocuous if adventurist Barbès and allowed him to return to his comfortable life on his southern estate. But Blanqui himself remained in debilitating confinement until 1859.

As for Proudhon, he had not supported the June insurrection. But in the Assembly, of which he was still a member, he rallied to the defense of the insurgents, making fiery speeches on their behalf and attacking the regime in his newspaper *Le Peuple*, which had acquired an immense readership among the working class for its militancy. When he published an article accusing Louis Napoleon of plotting to enslave the people of France, both *Le Peuple* and his other paper, *Le Représentant du peuple*, were suppressed, and he was expelled from the Assembly. Faced with arrest, Proudhon fled to Belgium but was



detected upon his return to Paris and sentenced to prison for three years, a term that he served out in various jails. There, in contrast to Blanqui, he spent

some of the best years of his life. French political prisoners in that happy age underwent a mild confinement. Proudhon was well-housed and well-fed; he could write, study, and receive his friends; he was even allowed to go out of his prison once a week to look after his affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Other revolutionists fled to England, Switzerland, or the United States. Cabet had returned to his utopian experiment in the United States even before the June insurrection; he died there, unknown, and was soon forgotten even in the land of his birth. Louis Blanc fled to England and became increasingly reformist; when he returned to France, upon on the overthrow of Napoleon III in 1870, he would participate in the National Assembly and oppose the Paris Commune of 1871. When Blanqui, by contrast, was released from prison in 1859, he immediately renewed his conspiratorial activities against the Second Empire; jailed again in 1861, he escaped from a prison hospital four years later and took refuge in Belgium.

Nothing so clearly conjures up the reactionary nightmare that descended on Europe in the 1850s than the treatment of Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian aristocrat-turned-revolutionary who became one of the most important anarchist leaders of the century. Owing to his violent rhetoric and behavior Bakunin had earned the bitter acrimony of Tsar Nicholas I, the spearhead of reaction in Europe. Although the Russian anarchist was by no means a regicide, his impassioned words and his collectivist views separated him markedly from the basically pacifistic and individualistic Proudhon, despite his encomiums to the Frenchman, whose anti-authoritarian ideas remained a lifelong inspiration to him.

But following an abortive uprising in Dresden in March 1849, in which he participated with Richard Wagner, Bakunin was captured by Saxon authorities and imprisoned for a year. The Saxons sentenced him to death, only to issue a reprieve so that he could be handed over to the Austrians, who in turn chained him to a dungeon wall for eleven months before sentencing him once again to death. Finally they commuted his sentence at the request of the tsar, and he was sent back to Russia, where Nicholas immured him in the recesses of the dreaded Peter and Paul Fortress, in St Petersburg. Bakunin languished in the fortress for six years, often under harsh conditions, neglected and plagued by scurvy, his isolation broken only by occasional visits from members of his family. With the advent of a more enlightened tsar, Alexander II, he was sent into exile in Siberia, where he remained for still another four years, after which he escaped, making his way back to Europe by crossing the Pacific Ocean to North America and then journeying eastward to London.

## EXILE IN LONDON

London had become the home of many exiles, who gravitated toward the English capital because of the freedom England offered to refugees from the counterrevolutionary governments on the continent. Nevertheless, the exiles—Prussian, French, Russian, and Austrian—were still the targets of continental police spies, who infiltrated their radical groups and reported on them in detail to their respective governments. These governments, in turn, tried to persuade the British home secretary to crack down on the exiles. They embroidered their reports with lurid plots, accusing some exiles of planning to assassinate Queen Victoria and, more absurdly, all the crowned heads of Europe. In 1850 the Austrian ambassador warned the home secretary that "the members of the Communist League, whose leaders were Marx, Engels, Bauer, and Wolff, discussed even regicide," while the next year the Prussian interior minister pressed the home secretary to take "decisive measures against the chief revolutionaries known by name" and transport them to the colonies. Happily for the exiles, the British authorities usually ignored these police accounts. As David McClellan notes in his biography of Marx, the Austrian ambassador

got the reply: "under our laws, mere discussion of regicide, so long as it does not concern the Queen of England and so long as there is no definite plan, does not constitute sufficient grounds for the arrest of the conspirators". The most the Home Office was prepared to do in answer to these demands was to give financial assistance to those refugees willing to emigrate to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Marx himself had by no means played a radical role in the German Revolution of 1848-49. Enamored of his "stages" theory of revolution, he had decided that the liberal German bourgeoisie, struggling to assert its supremacy over the feudal classes of the ancien régime, must take the lead in the unfolding revolutionary events. According to this theory, the bourgeoisie had to carry out its own revolution and establish a highly centralized republic, free of all feudal encumbrances, subdivisions, and obstacles to free trade and nationhood, before the workers could hope to achieve their own socialist goals.

Although Marx's writings from the 1840s had often spoken of the need for the workers to create their own revolutionary parties, independently of the bourgeoisie, during the 1848-49 revolutions he expressly advised them to subordinate their demands to those of bourgeois parties. The working class, he felt, was obliged to render critical support to the creation of a middle-class republic and assist the bourgeoisie in pushing the revolution toward the goal of a unified, industrialized, and commercially viable Germany. "The proletariat



has not the right to isolate itself," he declared; "however hard it may seem, it must reject anything that could separate it from its allies."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, he suppressed *The Communist Manifesto* (which he had co-written with Engels in 1847) and essentially disbanded the Communist League (which he had headed) in all but name. This policy of middle-class liberalism aroused the bitter opposition of the militant labor organizer Stephan Born, who was trying to form an all-German workers' movement, into which, as P. H. Noyes tells us, "such revolutionary force as workers had in 1848 was channeled."<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to Born, Marx was determined to have nothing to do with an independent workers' movement and instead became editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a Cologne newspaper (backed by Engels) that called itself "An Organ of Democracy" and dedicated itself to the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from feudal exactions. As editor, Marx pandered to the middle-class Cologne Democratic Union—the *Zeitung* even contained stock market reports—and established an editorial line that was hardly distinguishable from that of the liberal bourgeoisie, thoroughly antagonizing the workers of the city. Andreas Gottschalk, the militant leader of the Cologne Workers' Union, a socialist labor organization, excoriated the newspaper for being "in the hands of confirmed aristocrats, indeed the most dangerous of all, the aristocrats of money" and took Marx sharply to task for his essentially liberal editorial role.<sup>5</sup>

Upon the collapse of the German revolution in the spring of 1849, the newspaper was shut down, and Marx was expelled from Prussia. He and his family arrived in Paris in time for the June 13 demonstration against Louis Napoleon's breach of the constitution by invading Rome. But in August disappointment with Bonaparte's reactionary regime forced him to go to London, where he encountered various exile groups from the continent.

Soon after his arrival in London, however, Marx radically altered his policy. In an 1850 "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" (which had been revived in 1849), he and Engels essentially adopted Gottschalk's view of the relations between the workers and the "democratic" bourgeoisie, calling for an independent workers' party that would establish its own "revolutionary workers' governments, whether in the form of municipal committees and municipal councils or in the form of workers' clubs and workers' committees."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in any revolutionary situation, the "Address" argued, the workers' party must be distrustful and strictly independent of its presumed bourgeois and peasant allies. At best, it could ally itself with sectors of the bourgeoisie, but only cautiously and only with the most radical sectors. Following the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, such an alliance, the "Address" warned, must come to an end. The working class must retain its independence and compete electorally for positions in the new republic, seeking the "strictest centralization" of governmental power and opposing any

federalist schemes that would increase "the autonomy and independence for the [local] communities."<sup>7</sup>

This document is one of the most important in the theoretical armamentarium of what in time would be called Marxism, and its strictures were to be followed—or argued about—by Marxian movements, well into the 1900s. Based on this "Address," Marxist parties were expressly prohibited from participating in the cabinets and ministries of bourgeois governments or from forming coalition governments even with radical middle-class parties. This emphasis on the independence of the workers' parties remained a guiding policy of Marxist parties, often leading, in periods of crisis that erupted after 1848, to bitter factional disputes and cleavages within the fold of international Marxism.

Notwithstanding popular wisdom to the contrary, Marx's exile in London was not devoted exclusively to theoretical work. Indeed, he could hardly avoid becoming drawn into the internecine warfare that went on among his fellow exiles of various nationalities. During the 1850s and 1860s they battled each other incessantly over issues both trivial and major. Thus, republicans fought with each other and with socialists; putschist Blanquists crossed swords with advocates of a mass workers' movement; proto-anarchists, or at least opponents of political action, denounced "authoritarian socialists," or those who believed in parliamentary activity; and even the parliamentary wing of the various socialist groups was divided over how and to what degree legislative activity could produce basic social change. Socialist became an ecumenical word denoting everyone from social reformers to social revolutionaries; communist was increasingly identified with those who shared Marx's basically insurrectionary strategy, and anarchist encompassed the highly individualistic ideas of personal rebellion pioneered by Max Stirner and the Proudhonist mutualists.

Yet these conflicts should not be dismissed as mere wrangling. On the contrary, they were enormously important in sorting out major issues in revolutionary theory and strategy that had not been resolved—indeed, that could not have been resolved—during the heat of conflict. The workers who reared barricades in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna in 1848 had often had no clear idea of their goals, the best methods to achieve them, the divergent interests of their middle-class "allies," or the nature of the social forces they opposed. A man like Lamartine had been able to gain acceptance among many Parisian workers because he could veil his moderate policies in radical rhetoric, while Blanqui's followers hurled themselves into putsches that were doomed to failure because they failed to properly assess either the mood of the workers or the power of their class opponents. If they were not to repeat the miscalculations that had cost them the revolutions of 1848, the exiles had to use the hiatus to resolve a multitude of such unsettled problems and issues. If



there was to be a new revolutionary wave, as everyone expected, "exile wrangling" would be indispensable to its success.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL PROLETARIAT

It was also necessary for the exiles to analyze the deep and lasting transformations that Europe was undergoing: the spread of the Industrial Revolution to the continent, the expansion of the market economy, the emergence of still more new technologies, and the rise of a new type of worker—the factory-based industrial proletariat.

In England the Industrial Revolution, already under way for decades, catapulted her to global economic dominance, earning the country the appellation "the workshop of the world." But in France it would not become a considerable force until the 1880s. Even during the Second Empire, the country was still rooted in an artisanal and peasant economy. Under Louis Napoleon craft production still retained a firm hold on French manufacturing, especially since the country had uniquely positioned itself as the producer of fine handcrafted products, which necessitated the purposeful retention of traditional skills. But the authoritarian regime of Louis Napoleon, undisturbed by political factions, clubs, or legislatures, laid the basis for the Industrial Revolution by greatly expanding French markets and, above all, the country's transportation infrastructure. Steam engines, which in 1850 had numbered around 5,300, increased to 14,000 in 1860, and to 26,200 in 1869. Most important, French railway mileage soared between 1850 and 1870—from a mere 1,800 miles to 10,800. Before the establishment of the Second Empire, railroad lines had radiated out from Paris in only a few abbreviated trunk lines, but Louis Napoleon's twenty-year regime produced a full-fledged national railway system. Between 1852 and 1870 rail lines were extended to Bayonne on the Spanish frontier, Brest on the Atlantic, Cherbourg on the Channel coast, and Grenoble near Luxembourg—and the spaces between were filled with a complex network of subbranches.

The spread of railways would soon open up hitherto untouched areas of the country to economic development, enlarging the domestic market for consumer goods and undermining traditional ties between peasants, craftspeople, and notables by drawing them into the competitive cash economy. The growing industries in the north and northeast now had relatively easy access to remote parts of the countryside, whose inhabitants, in turn, could sell their produce in markets beyond their immediate locales. Trade was breaking down old provincial barriers between regions that had barely advanced beyond barter exchange, bringing them first handmade and later factory-made commodities. By lowering its own often-prohibitive tariffs in return for lowered tariffs abroad,

France greatly increased its volume of foreign trade—the value of French imports and exports increased from 2.6 billion francs in 1851 to about 8 billion in 1869, further impelling French capitalists to acquire modern machinery and use new methods of industrial production. The Paris Exposition of 1855 was a celebration not only of much-coveted French luxury goods but of French machinery and technical know-how.

Germany, for its part, was beginning to see significant industrial development as well. Although the German industrial revolution did not fully take off until the 1870s, the Zollverein, a customs union initially comprising seventeen German states, had already been established in 1834, removing internal barriers to trade, while in 1831 the Prussian government established the Gewerbe-Institut (Trade Institute) to stimulate the development and use of new industrial methods.

Slowly, factory machinery was introduced into the Prussian economy, especially for the weaving of cotton, while the military, recognizing the enormous importance of railroad lines in times of war, strongly encouraged their construction as well. In 1840, only 340 miles of railway track had been laid in all of the German states; in 1850, the mileage reached 3,700, nearly doubled a decade later, and even exceeded that of France, at 12,237, in 1870. Strikingly, in the same year Germany also exceeded France in output of pig iron. Despite wave after wave of emigration to the New World, Germany's population was growing rapidly—from 35 million in 1849 to 41 million in 1871. Before the century was out, England and Germany would both be engaged in mass production, and after the 1870s German industry would outstrip the British in chemicals, electrical goods, and sophisticated machines.

As the demand for steel increased—necessary as it was for engines, railroad tracks, and other metallic goods (including arms)—the inventions that made it more plentiful and less expensive followed apace. Coal and coke, available in huge quantities, had replaced charcoal early in the nineteenth century. In 1828 the Scottish inventor James B. Neilson built a blast furnace to spurt hot air over melting iron ore, which greatly economized the smelting process and increased the height of the small furnaces of the day to forty or even sixty feet. Traditional techniques for hammering the impurities out of pig iron were replaced by puddling, in which molten iron was stirred continually to produce a more malleable metal. Finally in 1856 Henry Bessemer patented the process that bears his name, in which cold air driven through molten iron rapidly removes the impurities. The cost of producing steel now dropped precipitously, as did the amount of time required to produce it: what had formerly taken ten days with charcoal and puddling now took only ten minutes with the Bessemer process. The price of steel plummeted to a fraction of its former cost, and the metal's availability made it a commonplace in industry, homes, and construction. At the same time the rural European landscape was changing



into a modern industrial panorama, complete with tall chimneys belching smoke, and huge furnaces that produced a fiery glare against the dark polluted sky.

The technological changes of the second half of the century were comparable in every way to those of cloth production and transportation that had driven the earlier stages of the industrial revolution. But the advent of electric power and synthetic chemicals, as well as advances in mining, brought ruin to many artisans, who were in no position to compete with the cheap goods produced by capital-intensive factories. By midcentury, except in France, merchants and industrialists were vastly diminishing both the status and function of independent masters and journeymen, increasingly making them ancillary to the larger industrial economy.

Nor could the power of the autocrats of Europe—large or small, pernicious or gentle—withstand the onslaught of industrialization. News now traveled faster than ever, over electric wires and by mail trains; printing presses became ever more automatic, disseminating ideas in the form of cheap books and periodicals to all parts of Europe and the entire world. The bourgeoisie wanted free trade, open borders, "free" workers, and a major say in affairs of state. As geographical barriers began to crumble, so too did the ideological barriers of the parochial quasi-feudal past, and the obstacles to new goods and new ideas, opening the way to mass nationwide movements such as trade unions and political parties.

By the 1860s European autocrats found that they had to make concessions not only to the bourgeoisie but also to the working classes, as they awakened from the torpor of their defeats of the late 1840s and early 1850s. Working-class militancy indeed began to revive, although it took a different form from what it had been in the 1840s. The ideas of associationism—the formation of cooperatives of artisans in similar trades in order to control those trades—and mutualism—the provision of low-interest credit to small entrepreneurs, linked by nonexploitative contracts—were acquiring an expanded meaning. The very social context of labor was undergoing significant changes. Artisans, who had hitherto been pitted against small factories and merchants, could hardly expect individually to supplant the industrial bourgeoisie, with its ever-larger plants, its multitude of unskilled or partly skilled proletarians, and its vast economic resources. The word association increasingly came to include the unity of the working class as a whole—internationally as well as nationally, despite differences in craft and status groups. In addition to cooperatives and trade associations, workers began to envision powerful "armies of labor," to use a phrase from proletarian socialism—namely, great unions, confederations, and even political parties that were sufficiently encompassing to confront the enormous power of the industrial bourgeoisie.

## THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Among the monarchs of continental Europe, none seems to have more acutely sensed that changes were in the offing than Louis Bonaparte. After 1860, under increasing fire from the French bourgeoisie, who wanted a greater say in the state, Louis was obliged to loosen his tight grip on France's political life. He now gave greater freedom to the press and allowed government measures to be openly criticized in the Corps Législatif (the lower legislative house), while the throne's annual speech could be freely debated by the parliamentarians. Indeed, before the decade was out, a republican opposition had even been permitted to emerge and enjoy a certain measure of political autonomy.

To countervail the demands of the new industrialists, Bonaparte also tried to gain working-class support, thereby pitting one class against the other—another typically Bonapartist feature. In 1860 he allowed workers to form mutual aid and benefit associations, restored their legal right to strike, and permitted individual workers to run for public office on labor-oriented platforms—provided, to be sure, that they did not form a political party. (When the government made overtures to offer better credit terms, the Proudhonist mutualists, with their demand for the low-interest loans for artisans, were surprisingly responsive and flirted politically with members of the royal family.)

To placate the bourgeoisie, between 1860 and 1862 the emperor concluded a series of commercial treaties with Britain, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and Prussia that reduced trade barriers and provided a strong stimulus to French industry. Key French companies were concentrated in fewer hands, leading to more large-scale production and technological modernization. But Bonaparte's motives were not entirely economic. Closer cooperation between the French and English economies was spurred not only by commercial considerations but by the emperor's own diplomacy, which was oriented, despite centuries of bitter enmity, toward forging an alliance between the two major Channel countries.

The growing entente between Britain and France nurtured not only closer economic and diplomatic ties but a closer affinity between the French and British working classes. The interlocking of English with French economic interests and the introduction of English technological innovations into French industry meant that the working classes of the two countries shared a new community of interest. But French unskilled workers lagged far behind their British counterparts in self-organization and in concrete economic gains: in Britain the working day had been reduced to ten hours, but when the Bonapartist regime tried to pass similar legislation in France, the bourgeoisie was able to circumvent it. Although French workers acquired a limited right to



strike, they were not permitted to organize trade unions like their class brothers and sisters in England.

In 1862 a delegation of French workers crossed the Channel to attend the London International Exhibition. Their trip was subsidized by the government, which probably hoped that the moderate reform-oriented mentality that prevailed among English workers would make an impression on the more volatile French. Actually, the visit resulted in a renewed liaison between militant English trade unionists and French insurrectionists. In December 1863 British workers dispatched an appeal to their French counterparts to take common action in support of the emancipation of Poland, a cause that was almost as popular in London as it was in Paris. The British workers also had a very practical self-interest in international working-class comity: their employers had been importing continental strikebreakers during labor disputes, a practice that severely obstructed their struggles for better pay and working conditions. The trade unions were particularly eager to enlist French working-class support, in order to bring this practice to a definitive end.

As a result, contacts between working-class leaders on both sides of the Channel became more frequent; not only was the solidarity between the French and English greatly strengthened, but each contributed to the other's strike funds. Finally, they decided to hold a joint public meeting in London to strengthen their ties and to support the Poles. The meeting, which was held on September 28, 1864, in Saint Martin's Hall, was packed with 2,000 people, many of whom claimed to represent British, Irish, and continental European workers. It proved to be of historic importance: even as almost all the governments of continental Europe were trying to crush any incipient workers' movement, or perhaps because they were trying to do so, the working classes of various countries eagerly met to mobilize their forces and create their own unified international movement.

Ideologically, the assembly in Saint Martin's Hall was very mixed: it consisted mainly of English trade unionists, including former Chartists and Owenites, who were eager to eliminate continental strikebreaking, but there were also French Proudhonist mutualists, Italian and Polish nationalists, and a medley of exiles from other countries. After much oratory, largely focused on solidarity with the Poles and the need for working-class unity, the meeting enthusiastically resolved to found what was to be called the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), which eventually entered into the history of socialism as the First International.

Listed last among the distinguished supporters invited to sit on the platform was one "Dr. Marx," who had been asked to address the meeting on behalf of the German workers. Rather than speak himself, however, he gave the floor to Johann George Eccarius, his fellow exile and member of the old Communist League, who ably acquitted himself while Marx remained in the background.

Thus Marx played no direct role in convening or addressing the meeting, claims that he founded the First International (made by some historians of the labor movement) notwithstanding.

After much oratory and enthusiasm, the meeting elected a Central Committee (later renamed the General Council) to administer the organization's affairs, consisting half of English trade unionists and the remaining half of the diverse radical and nationalist exiles in London. The Committee quickly established a subcommittee to draw up the declaration of principles and a set of governing rules for the new Association. Several plainly tendentious declarations and sets of statutes were submitted, including the provisional regulations of Mazzini's Italian Workers Association, a highly centralized organization, strongly nationalistic in orientation, that actually had very little standing among Italian workers. This document, despite its literary crudity and its ideological confusion, was nearly adopted by the subcommittee, but fortunately, due largely to Marx's remonstrances, it was agreed that the proposed document should be "edited," a task that finally fell to Marx himself, who proceeded to rewrite large portions of the declaration of principles and reduce the rules from forty to ten. The new draft, patently superior to its Mazzinian precursor, was unanimously adopted by the Committee at its next meeting and published widely as a penny pamphlet.

In this respect, Marx deserves the credit, if not for founding the IWMA, at least for writing its founding documents, the historic "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association." More than half of the address is occupied with contrasting the enormous increase in the wealth of the capitalist countries with the absence of progress in the material condition of workers and detailing the miseries they suffer. In its closing pages it celebrates recent working-class victories, such as the passage of the ten-hour working day by the British parliament and the growth of the cooperative movement. Marx's hand can be seen very clearly when the address calls upon workers to unite to "conquer political power," and very dramatically in its closing appeal, "Proletarians of all countries, Unite!" As for the "provisional rules," its preamble opens with the assertion that "the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves," and it closes with the slogan: "No rights without duties, no duties without rights."<sup>8</sup>

This last slogan—which would later adorn the mastheads of socialist and anarchist periodicals worldwide—did not come easily from Marx's pen; it was foisted on him, and he seems to have accepted it only reluctantly. As he wrote to Engels, shortly after the adoption of documents, he had been "obliged to insert two sentences about 'duty' and 'right' and ditto about 'truth, morality and justice' in the preamble to the rules, but these are so placed that they can do no harm."<sup>9</sup> This passage reveals the aversion that both men shared toward any socialism that was even vaguely moralistic, in contrast to the materialistic approach they hoped to foster.



The actual role that the IWMA played in the struggle for socialism has been greatly exaggerated over the years, in no small part by the bourgeois press, which tried to frighten its readers by invoking a perilous "red specter" that threatened to undermine society itself. In fact, many of its national sections could not even be regarded as collectivist in outlook, let alone socialist. The English trade unionists were primarily looking for ways to make their strikes more effective, while the Proudhonist mutualists, who were hostile to strikes, loathed all forms of collectivism and regarded small-scale property and the patriarchal family as the building blocks of a new society. The Italian nationalists, following Mazzini, almost entirely eschewed socialism. It is noteworthy that neither the "Inaugural Address" nor the preamble to the rules makes any mention of collectivism, still less of socialism and communism— notions that would have been offensive to many of its members. Rather, the documents contain encomia to cooperatives, which were popular among workers in England and France at the time. As for Marx's call to "conquer political power," it must have been essentially smuggled into the document during an unguarded moment, for it could only have survived the scrutiny of the Proudhonists on the committee because their enthusiasm momentarily swept away their critical faculties.

Despite its many different, often bitterly conflicting tendencies, the IWMA managed to remain intact until 1876, after which it was formally dissolved. During the 1860s it consisted largely of a loose agglomeration of national and local sections or "federations," many of which were at odds with each other over a host of political and organizational issues. Admittedly, the IWMA played a valuable practical and inspirational role in mobilizing, educating, and leading workers, often in large numbers, in common struggles to improve their material conditions. But it was largely a defensive organization: more often than not, its national sections were fighting with their backs to the wall against the assaults of their respective governments and various employers. By its very existence, however, the International gave workers a boost in morale and a sense that they were not completely isolated in their specific local struggles.

Many actions, be they strikes or uprisings, were imputed to the International with little or no regard as to whether it was actually involved in them. Although it was falsely accused of leading the Paris Commune of 1871, the International never staged an uprising anywhere in the world, nor did it lead any sizable strike or strike movement of its own. Many of the strikes that swept over Britain and the continent during the 1860s, to be sure, involved members of the International—in England, even members of the General Council—but they functioned primarily as trade unionists rather than as Internationalists. For the most part, the federations of the International tried to assist strikes and protests by publicizing workers' grievances, opposing foreign strikebreakers, and gathering funds among other workers' organizations for the support of their

striking comrades. While these activities greatly enhanced the prestige of the International among workers throughout the world, they hardly constituted a danger to bourgeois society.

During its short existence, the IWMA held four major congresses between its founding meeting in London and its Hague Congress, where it was split irreparably in 1872, and its General Council was transferred to the United States. At no time did the delegates to these congresses ever number more than a hundred people, and although they presumably represented affiliated federations in about eleven countries, a number of delegates represented only token sections. Some delegations were merely individual exiles from countries in which all working-class activity had been completely suppressed, while others represented groups so small that they barely qualified as more than nuclei of national federations. In fact, the size of a national delegation at an IWMA congress usually depended upon the country where the congress was held. At the Geneva (1866) and Lausanne (1867) congresses, for example, the largest delegations were Franco-Swiss, more or less reflecting the general population of the area in which the congress was convened, while at Brussels (1868) the largest was, not surprisingly, the Belgian delegation. These annual congresses were often riven by a multitude of important theoretical issues that were furiously debated, often culminating in IWMA resolutions that were adopted by a majority vote. In practice, the national groups, on their return home, frequently went their own way, irrespective of the congresses' decisions. Nevertheless, the congresses were grappling, slowly, painfully, and sometimes indecisively, with issues that would be of enormous significance for the labor movement for generations to come—indeed, because of their theoretical and practical consequences in later years, their proceedings deserve closer study than is possible here.

In the early congresses (Geneva in 1866, Lausanne in 1867, and Brussels in 1868), the most compelling issue was the debate between the so-called "Marx party" (few of whom, in fact, were Marxists doctrinally), which favored socialism, and Proudhonist individualists, who hoped to supplant capitalism by fostering small-scale peasant and artisan proprietors. The Proudhonists, whose views reflected the interests of an archaic and waning stratum of artisans and small food cultivators, were convinced that the principal causes of their economic difficulties lay with moneylenders and bankers, and that the problems of the working class could be removed by having worker- or state-controlled People's Banks provide proprietors with low-interest credit. This analysis minimized the social relations embodied in the capitalist market and industry and instead regarded the main enemy of small entrepreneurs as finance capitalists and bankers, who lived off interest rather than the fruits of productive labor. Often this emphasis took an expressly anti-Semitic turn when Jews, such as the Rothschilds, were cast as the main villains of society, rather than manufacturers and the system of capitalist social relations as such.



Proudhon bequeathed a very mixed legacy to his disciples in his *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, published in 1865, the year of his death. Here, as in the *General Idea* in 1851, he softened his aversion for associationism by allowing that it could not be avoided in large-scale industries. In a passage that had an immense influence on many Proudhonists, the *maître* wrote:

Mutualism intends men to associate only insofar as this is required by the demands of production, the cheapness of goods, the needs of consumption and the security of the producers themselves, i.e. in those cases where it is not possible for the public to rely on private industry, nor for private industry to accept the responsibility and risks involved in running the concerns on their own. . . . There is undoubtedly a case for association in the large-scale manufacturing, extractive and metallurgical industries. . . . What is the position if we think of the thousands of crafts and trades proliferating in the towns and even in the rural areas? For these I do not think association offers any advantages; all the more so since any benefits that might follow are already assured by the network of reciprocal guarantees, mutual credit and insurance, market control, etc. etc.<sup>10</sup>

Proudhon's reluctant acknowledgment of the need for association was a pragmatic response to the rise of large-scale production and modern transportation. Although he was a federalist (as distinguished from a statist), it did not supplant in any way his commitment to individual entrepreneurship. Not surprisingly, when the anarchist Bakunin, at congresses of the International, supported collectivism, the major Proudhonist spokesmen furiously opposed him. But many workers read Proudhon's remarks not as a circumstantial endorsement of associations (or cooperatives) in only certain large-scale industries, but as a general endorsement of them as an alternative to modern capitalist industry—that is, they wrongly concluded that economic cooperatives, confederally organized by means of contracts and credit networks, lay at the heart of Proudhon's vision for the good society.

Nor was this the only respect in which Proudhon exhibited a regressive influence. Owing to their emphasis on the patriarchal family as the basic unit of social life, the Proudhonists rejected any role in the productive process for women (although most artisans freely used the labor of their wives, daughters, and female domestics in their workshops). Seeming to oppose all civil rights for women, they argued that woman's place was in the home, where her "natural" limitations destined her to rear children and see to family needs, while the civil realm fell "naturally" within the purview of men. Finally, as we have seen, the Proudhonists also objected to local strikes, which they regarded as coercive and potentially violent. But life repeatedly intruded on this Proudhonist shibboleth,

and the Proudhonists at the Lausanne Congress reluctantly surrendered it, together with their opposition to political action. The French delegation to the IWMA, it should be emphasized, was predominantly Proudhonist, led by Henri Tolain, a bronze engraver; Pierre-Coullery, a physician from French-speaking Switzerland; and even Charles Longuet, later Marx's son-in-law and devout supporter. Opposed to the Proudhonists were the collectivists or socialists, who called for participation in elections and the public ownership of land, railways, mines, and forests and tended to make more searching analyses of capitalism. Marx, from London, provided much of their theoretical framework, although many groups within the IWMA supported socialistic views on their own initiative. Even in France, notable collectivists appeared, as Henryk Katz notes in his highly objective account of the International:

The repressions in France [in the 1860s] pushed the [labor] movement toward resistance societies and syndical chambers, the types of organization tolerated by the government. This was in line with the continuing trend from classical Proudhonianism toward militant syndicalism.<sup>11</sup>

This shift was typified most notably by the bookbinder Eugène Varlin and the dyer Benoît Malon, who had begun as Proudhonists but were drifting away from many of its key tenets.<sup>12</sup> Not only were they prepared to engage in political activity, in violation of Proudhon's ideas (if not his practice), they were also committed to trade-union organization, strikes, and armed insurgency.

Most at odds with Proudhon's views were the revolutionary syndicalist ideas that these men began to advance. Indeed, Varlin, as the ablest and most militant trade-union leader in France, may well be regarded as the father of revolutionary syndicalism. But their ideas also had a communalist dimension: they opposed both mutualism and "authoritarian Communism"—that is, both Proudhon and Marx. Varlin and Malon called themselves "collectivists" and were committed to a form of socialism or anarchism based on communal confederations as well as trade unions.<sup>13</sup> How far they had moved from Proudhonism may be judged by the acrimony of their clashes with their former comrades: the French Proudhonist Ernst Fribourg disdainfully described them as a strong "party of liberal communists [*communistes libéraux*]," words that were as close as one could come in the 1860s to "libertarian communists,"<sup>14</sup> while Varlin, for his part, did not hesitate to dismiss Tolain and his following as "Proudhonist enragés." In the new labor movement, says Katz,

Varlin was the recognized national leader and enjoyed increasing international prestige. He was in continuous correspondence with provincial centers and various organizations and leaders in Belgium, Switzerland, and



Germany. ... More than anyone else, Varlin was capable of articulating the ideas of the radicalized movement that was variously described as "Socialisme collectiviste," "Communisme libérale," "Communisme anti-autoritaire," and "Socialisme révolutionnaire."<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, Marx and Bakunin were both to describe Varlin as their comrade in their writings on the Paris Commune.

At its early congresses the International wrangled repeatedly over the distinctions between collectivism and Proudhonist individualism. At Geneva and Lausanne, both in French-speaking Switzerland, a sufficient number of Proudhonist delegates were in attendance to pass resolutions that favored their view, but at the Brussels Congress of 1868, the majority adopted a collectivist resolution on public ownership. At that point most—albeit not all—of the Proudhonists ceased to attend congresses of the International.

The IWMA congresses also debated other issues, such the role of violence in transforming society, the formation of popular militias, the coalitions (if any) that federations of the International could validly make with radical bourgeois or petty bourgeois organizations, and even the legitimacy of the presence of nonworkers in congresses and the General Council. (Excluding nonworkers would have made all intellectuals, including Marx and Bakunin, ineligible for membership.)

But the next explosive issue to confront the International was that of the state and parliamentary politics. In fact, this issue haunted every one of its later congresses and was raised repeatedly—explicitly or implicitly—in debates among socialists, collectivists, Proudhonists, trade unionists, nationalists, and anarchists. By opposing all forms of collectivism, the large contingent of Proudhonists in the early years had averted a direct confrontation between statist socialists and antistatist socialists, since all socialists felt the need to unite against the individualists. But the departure of most of the Proudhonists at Brussels freed statist and antistatist socialists for an open collision that was finally to tear the International apart.

## MARX AND BAKUNIN

This conflict was shaped overwhelmingly by the duel between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin for the control of the International. Bakunin did not join the International until fairly late, in July 1868, while to all appearances he and Marx were still on excellent terms. In the 1840s Bakunin had been a friend and collaborator of Marx and Engels around the publication of Arnold Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Removed from European politics for twelve

years after 1849 by his imprisonment and exile in Russia, he finally escaped from Siberia and reappeared in London at the end of 1861. In November 1864, shortly before Bakunin's departure for Italy, Marx exhibited a very amiable attitude toward the Russian and assured Bakunin that, rumors to the contrary, he had defended Bakunin against a slander that he had been a Russian spy. Writing to Engels, Marx noted that "I liked [Bakunin] very much, more so than previously," and said that he was "one of the few people whom after sixteen years I find to have moved forward and not backward."<sup>16</sup> As a sign of friendship, Marx even sent Bakunin an inscribed copy of his newly published *Capital*.

Bakunin did not respond to this gesture for quite some time. He had been occupied with establishing his own international anarchist organization, the International Alliance for Socialist Democracy, a network with a central bureau in Geneva and sections in Italy, France, and Switzerland. (At the same time he was also trying to create a secret, elite, and highly disciplined vanguard group, the International Brotherhood.) The Alliance had its own statutes and program, calling for an end to religion, equality of the sexes, the abolition of inheritance, and a scattered number of other proposals. Bakunin seems to have intended that it function both inside and outside the International, ostensibly to compensate for the IWMA's emphasis on economic questions by placing a special emphasis on philosophical and religious matters. In November 1868 he applied to the General Council in London for admittance of his Alliance to the International as a relatively autonomous branch.

Up to this point, as Franz Mehring observes, Marx had "continued to harbour feelings of friendship for the old revolutionary Bakunin, and he opposed various attacks which were made or planned against Bakunin amongst his, Marx's, immediate circle."<sup>17</sup> But Marx had strong disagreements with the formulations in the program and statutes of the Alliance, producing a disaffection toward Bakunin that was exacerbated by personal gossip. Moreover, the Alliance's application for admittance appeared to be a *de facto* proposal for the existence of two parallel internationals, each with its own central body, that would inevitably come to loggerheads. This caused Marx to develop strong suspicions about Bakunin's intentions in joining the International.

Needless to say, the General Council decided to reject the Alliance's application—and ironically, it was on this very day that Bakunin finally responded to inquiries that Marx had indirectly passed on to Bakunin about his intentions. "You ask whether I am still your friend," Bakunin wrote.

Yes, more than ever, my dear Marx, for I understand better than ever how right you were to walk along the broad avenue of the economic revolution, to invite us all to follow you, and to denounce all those who wandered off



into the byways of nationalist or exclusively political enterprise. . . . My fatherland is now the International, whose chief founder you have been. You see, then, dear friend that I am your pupil—and I am proud to be this.<sup>18</sup>

Marx may very well have perceived in the letter a Proudhonist subtext that denied the importance of "political enterprise." Be that as it may, the General Council did not reject the Alliance altogether; rather, it permitted Bakunin and his supporters to enter the International—on the condition that they disband the Alliance as an international organization and convert its sections into branches of the IWMA. Bakunin agreed, but whether he really intended to dissolve the only successful international organization he had created up to that time is a much-disputed issue. Surprisingly, however, the Council agreed to let him retain his central bureau in Geneva as a propaganda group, which Bakunin and his supporters readily accepted, allowing as it did a distinctive organizational center for themselves. There is ample evidence to show that in 1870–71, as the dispute between Bakunin and Marx escalated, the old Alliance sections generally retained their libertarian identity and ideas. But that they continued to exist as a parallel organization, as Marx maintained, is arguable.

Many accounts of the dispute between the Bakuninists and Marxists tend to focus so strongly on the unsavory machinations by both sides that their important theoretical and organizational differences are often neglected. In principle, Marx was committed to a strong, highly centralized workers' movement, ultimately a workers' party, that would use the political arena to mobilize the entire working class to attain state power. Where artisanal socialists in the 1840s had merely called upon the state to foster the development of associations, Marx persistently argued for the nationalization of the economy and for planned production and distribution. Following the success of the workers in a revolutionary confrontation with capitalism, there would eventually emerge a communist society that would be guided not by profit but by the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

This approach, for Marx, presupposed the existence of the state—a workers' state, to be sure, but a state nonetheless—that would initially exercise dictatorial powers to suppress the bourgeoisie and rapidly develop the productive forces to eliminate material want and reduce the long working hours that inhibited the community's participation in public life. Writing in the 1850s and 1860s, Marx assigned a "historically progressive role" to capitalism, namely the development of modern industrial technology, without which arduous toil and material scarcity could not be eliminated. Moreover, the modern factory, in Marx's view, would play the additional role of organizing the

working class in huge industrial units and bringing it into direct confrontation with the industrial bourgeoisie.

This theoretical orientation had distinct political consequences. Marxian socialists welcomed the elimination of archaic barriers to capitalism such as guild restrictions, artisanship, small-scale peasant agriculture, and the like, indeed all decentralized political and economic entities that might impede the centralization of the state and the economy, and the opening of the domestic market for capitalist expansion. Hence, Marx vehemently championed the formation of centralized nation-states as the most suitable economic terrain for the growth of industry and technology.

By the same token, he favored the formation of a highly centralized workers' party that would ultimately challenge the political sovereignty of the bourgeoisie, through elections where possible, through insurrection, or both. In the "Inaugural Address" for the International, Marx had consciously compromised his basic views in order to satisfy the largely artisanal working class, at a time when forging unity among workers was a far more important task than highlighting doctrinal differences. But it was precisely the industrial proletariat that he believed was capable of bringing about the demolition of capitalism and ultimately the achievement of a communist society.

To be sure, Bakunin shared many views with Marx—his materialistic approach to history and contemporary social problems, his emphasis on class struggle, and his advocacy of the collective ownership of property. Allowing for many ambiguities, both men championed a collectivist society that, be it gradually or rapidly, would lead to the elimination of private property and classes and to the resolution of the historic "social question"—notably, the existence of oppression, exploitation, poverty, and domination. But Bakunin's differences with Marx were also enormous. In contrast to Marx's reliance on the industrial proletariat, Bakunin, drawing on his experiences in Russia and Italy, favored small-scale artisans, peasants, and even lumpenproletarians (whom Marx despised) as constituting the hegemonic strata for the destruction of capitalism. Moreover, Bakunin considered the state as the principal support of oppression and saw no need for it in any form—bourgeois or proletarian. Indeed, in his view, the centralization of the state, far from advancing the workers' and peasants' prospects for social change, would have detrimental effects on them, remaking them in its own technocratic and bureaucratic image. It subverted their "instinct" for resistance and revolution, as he put it, blunting their "natural" impulse for freedom. Engaging in politics, Bakunin held, and especially forming centralized parties, would oblige workers and peasants to create centralized political bureaucracies that would eventually bring them into complicity with their own oppression in the political as well as the economic sphere.

To Marx's centralistic and statist views, Bakunin, taking his cue from



Proudhon, opposed a confederal system of production and social administration.\* Confederatism denoted a system of contractual agreements among workshops, factories, and communities that were collectively controlled by their members, in which collective affairs are managed through confederal councils of mandated and recallable delegates. These councils, Bakunin believed, would not constitute a state: their principal functions would be administrative, coordinating the decisions of the people in a given commune and among communes at the various regional, national, and international levels of confederation.

Bakunin's vision of an anarchist society was most succinctly expressed in "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood," where he sketched out a "federal government," based on "the absolutely autonomous commune, always represented by the majority vote of all the inhabitants," as well as "workers' associations," which would be pyramidally structured into regional and national confederations. This society would have its own libertarian "social constitution," with "laws," "courts," and "parliaments"—structures that are by no means compatible with the "absolute and complete freedom" of the individual that Bakunin, like Proudhon, also prized.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to say whether Bakunin used words such as "social constitutions," "laws," "courts," and "parliaments" literally or metaphorically. Well versed neither in economics nor in history, he seems ultimately to have relied on the "revolutionary instinct" of the masses to achieve workable collectivist agreements, and on their "revolutionary spontaneity" and on public opinion to administer an equitable anarchist society based on quasi-communistic principles. Marx, for his part, maintained that the proletariat would be compelled toward class consciousness and revolution not by any "revolutionary instinct" but by the "inexorable laws" of capitalist economic development.

The differences between Marx's centralistic, political, and statist approach and Bakunin's decentralistic, antipolitical, and confederalist approach were to be hardened into dogmas by their disciples, opening a chasm between them that seemed unbridgeable, far greater, perhaps, than either man ever intended. But before this hardening took place, Marx and Bakunin were extraordinarily flexible and open to the effects of new social developments on their political ideas. Occasionally they also advanced ideas, especially concerning methods of changing society, that were very much at odds with their seemingly rigid ideological premises.

Despite his affirmations of "revolutionary spontaneity," for example,

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\* The word for confederalism commonly used in Europe at this time was *federalism*. I am using *confederalism* here because *federalism* has since come to mean an association of small states held together by a fairly centralized nation-state.

Bakunin clearly believed that a well-disciplined, secret vanguard organization, indeed a "general staff" (as he called it in one of his several programs for the International Brotherhood), would be necessary to shepherd the masses through a social revolution. He explicitly rejected endowing it with powers of "dictatorship and custodial control," but in achieving the overthrow of capitalism, it would doubtless have to play a guiding role at the very least.\*

Moreover, although abstention from participation in the institutions of the state was a cardinal principle of Bakunin's libertarian faith, one that he propounded with all his vigor, he sometimes encouraged his own supporters to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. In a letter to one of his adherents, Carlo Gambuzzi, Bakunin seemed to fully agree that he should run for the Italian Chamber of Deputies. "You will perhaps be surprised that I, a determined and passionate abstentionist from politics," he wrote,

should now advise my friends [members of the Alliance] to become deputies—this because circumstances have changed. First, all my friends, and most assuredly yourself, are so inspired by our ideas, our principles, that there is no danger that you will forget, deform, or abandon them, or that you will fall back into the old political habits. Second, times have become so grave, the danger menacing the liberty of all countries so formidable, that all men of goodwill must step into the breach, and especially our friends, who must be in a position to exercise the greatest possible influence on events.<sup>20</sup>

Bakunin's confidence in the anarchistic integrity of his supporters was surely misplaced—he had already seen more than one of them become Marxists, strict parliamentarians, or worse, over the passage of time.

Again, despite his decentralist views, Bakunin was quite prepared, even eager, to grant the IWMA's General Council enormous powers—powers that, in fact, were later to be used with serious effect against him. The Basel Congress of 1869 gave the Council the right to admit or refuse entry to individuals or groups, and to suspend any section that it regarded as working against the interests of the International. Such actions on the part of the Council, to be sure, could be appealed to the International's congresses, which alone had the authority to reverse them. But the measure, passed with Bakunin's strong

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\* Michael Bakunin, "Programme and Purpose of the Revolutionary Organization of International Brothers," in *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), p. 172. There is a good deal of confusion over which program of the International Brotherhood is more definitive. Certainly the more comprehensive is the "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood" (also in the Lehning collection), which is nearly four times as long as the "Programme and Purpose."



support as well as Marx's, centralized the International far more than it had been in the past.

By the same token, Marx could seem, at times, almost as libertarian as Bakunin. In *The Civil War in France*, a set of addresses that he wrote on behalf of the General Council, Marx extolled the Paris Commune of 1871 in extraordinarily quasi-libertarian terms. The Commune, as we will see, was a revolt against state centralization as such and was deeply influenced by anti-authoritarian concepts of confederalism. Surprisingly, Marx decidedly did not reject this opposition to state centralization—indeed, the libertarianism of this book is highly unusual in the bulk of his writings concerning the state and stands very much at odds with the centralized ideas that dominate the "Address" of 1850. As we shall see, he hailed the Commune's decentralized organizational structure profusely and for a time seemed to regard it as a model structure to be followed by proletarian revolutions.

After 1868 the conflicts between Marx and Bakunin played themselves out at the congresses of the International. In 1868–69 it became clear that despite Bakunin's concessions to the General Council, the Alliance had not fully merged into the International. Bakunin continued to champion the Alliance's program, especially its antipolitical views and its call for the abolition of inheritance as a decisive step in attaining the abolition of private property. To Marx, abolishing inheritance first, before private property, was like placing the cart before the horse; inheritance was merely a peripheral issue, in his analysis, and like all aspects of capitalist relations, it would obviously be swept away when the proletariat became the majority in a given country and directly abolished private property as such.

Bakunin also continued to recognize the right to the private ownership of land (a Proudhonist precept), which, he maintained, would finally disappear only when inherited property reverted to the community. It seems very likely that, while personally supporting the abolition of private property, he camouflaged his antiproprietary views (which conflicted with Proudhon) in order to avoid antagonizing the peasantry and possibly his artisan supporters. Once again, Marx argued that land ownership would necessarily be abolished along with all private property. Indeed, capitalism, Marx held, would eventually eliminate nearly all preindustrial classes, or at least draw them into the orbit of the capitalist market. Hence only the proletariat would be capable of abolishing capitalist society, possibly with the aid of other oppressed strata.

These conflicts came into the open at the Basel Congress of 1869, where Bakunin and his supporters made the abolition of inheritance "the most hotly contested issue" on the agenda, as G.D.H. Cole puts it.<sup>21</sup> After considerable debate, a plurality of the delegates voted in favor of Bakunin's position, but they failed to acquire the absolute majority that was necessary for the position to be officially adopted by the International. The respective supporters of Marx and

Bakunin now girded themselves for a bitter confrontation at the next congress—but only two weeks before the 1870 congress was to convene, Louis Napoleon was provoked into declaring war against Prussia.

History, as it were, now intervened to push the International to the background, for searing events not only rendered all abstract theoretical discussions academic, they led to the creation of the Paris Commune of 1871, an uprising that was to acquire legendary proportions in the history of Marxism and anarchism alike.

## NOTES

1. George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 130. Woodcock's reference to "that happy age" is quite inaccurate. Many French prisoners, including Blanqui, were treated very harshly and either became seriously ill or died as a result of their suffering.
2. David McClellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 231.
3. Marx quoted in Stephan Born, *Erinnerungen*, p. 102, in *ibid.*, p. 202.
4. P. H. Noyes, *Organization and Revolution: Working-Class Associations in the German Revolutions of 1848-1849* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 123.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" (March 1850); in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: Marx and Engels 1849-1851 (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 283. I am using the standard English title for this work, despite the title given it in *Collected Works*, "Address of the Central Authority to the League."
7. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
8. Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association" and "Provisional Rules of the Association," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 20: Marx-Engels 1864-1868 (New York: International Publishers, 1985), pp. 5-16.
9. Karl Marx, letter to Engels, November 4, 1864, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 42: Marx-Engels 1864-1868 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 18.
10. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865), excerpted in *Selected Writings of P.-J. Proudhon*, ed. Stewart Edwards (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 62-3, emphasis added.
11. Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 44.
12. Eugène Varlin was erroneously referred to as "Jean Varlin" on page vii of volume 1 of *The Third Revolution*.
13. Quoted in Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor*, p. 45.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
16. Marx, letter to Engels, November 4, 1864, *Collected Works*, vol. 42, pp. 18-19.



17. Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 434.
18. Bakunin to Marx, December 22, 1868, quoted in Anthony Masters, *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974), p. 181.
19. See Michael Bakunin, "Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood" (1866), in *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), pp. 64-93, esp. pp. 69, 70-1.
20. *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 218-19.
21. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 2: *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 130.

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## CHAPTER 30 Prelude to the Paris Commune

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The Franco-Prussian War marked the clash of two contrasting but hitherto parallel developments in nineteenth-century Europe.

In 1870 both France and Germany—in its various stages of unification—were still predominantly rural. Although both countries were on the threshold of the industrial revolution, nearly seventy per cent of the French population and sixty per cent of the German population lived in rural areas. In the two decades that Louis Napoleon sat on the throne, as we have seen, he did not decisively alter this basic economic landscape: even when the Second Empire came to an end, artisanal labor still produced the bulk of French goods, and the peasants still accounted for the great majority of the French population. Unskilled proletarians producing machine-made commodities were becoming much more numerous, but in 1870 French artisans still occupied a considerable place in the economic life of their country—particularly in Paris, which remained a world center of artisanal excellence, and its working class still consisted mainly of artisans rather than industrial proletarians.

Politically, after the bloodletting of June 1848, the Parisian workers had retreated back to their neighborhoods, apathetic and disdainful of the bourgeoisie that had condemned their rising. The years of repression, accompanied by improved economic conditions, left France politically inert—its provincials largely Bonapartist, its city residents smoldering with bitter disillusionment or turning inward to cope with problems of material well-being. The reputation of the Second Empire as not only dissolute and pleasure-loving but crassly mean-spirited and egoistic has a strong basis in fact. In the 1850s, much to the satisfaction of the ruling classes, Bonaparte delivered on his promise to provide a stable authoritarian state, control over the working classes, and economic growth.

Most notably, as we have seen, Napoleon III laid the infrastructure for France's leap forward into an industrial economy in the closing decades of the century. Much of the new economic prosperity he gave France came as a result



of the massive public works programs he instituted. His government borrowed great sums to build or improve the country's roads, railways, bridges, canals, and cities. But the years of growth in the Second Empire were gained essentially by mortgaging France's economic future to achieve a buoyant present. By concentrating its economic resources on constructing transportation and infrastructure—and equipping a large French army—Bonaparte's regime failed to generate an industrial revolution in France. In effect, the emperor had laid the groundwork for the transformation of France to an industrial society, rather than produce it directly.

Which is not to say that industry was absent—on the contrary, Bonaparte himself did import English-style factories to the country and foster their development at home. Indeed, if Paris itself was still artisanal, the Parisian suburbs were filling up with factories. Locomotive works, railway repair shops, chemical plants, and metallurgical works materialized outside the capital's walls, utilizing the labor of a new type of working class, the industrial proletariat. These men and women, instead of selling wares they had made to merchants and the public, were paid hourly or piecework wages for producing goods according to increasingly rationalized systems of production, and commodities that had once been crafted by skilled handworkers were increasingly fabricated by relatively unskilled workers mobilized in highly mechanized factories. Moreover, many French and German artisans were now *de facto* subsidiary employees of factory owners who, since they still required their skills, permitted them to work at home or in small workshops. Try as they might to hold on to their independence and maintain their corporations (in Germany, guilds were still common), these workers occupied an intermediate position between traditional craftspeople and the modern industrial proletariat. Nevertheless, even as factories multiplied, these artisans were steadily absorbed into the industrial world and reduced to mere proletarians.

During the two Bonapartist decades, the population of all of France's industrial cities ballooned. Roubaix, a major textile center in the north, trebled in population; Toulouse, Lille, and Lyon doubled; and the great port cities of Marseilles and Bordeaux were half again as large, despite the fact that the French population as a whole rose by only two million between 1851 and 1861 and in fact by 1872 decreased by more than a million, which suggested that much of the urban population increase was primarily the result of internal migration from the countryside and the conversion of peasants into proletarians.

In Paris in particular, as David H. Pinkney tells us, population growth was so rapid that in 1850 congestion was already an immensely serious problem:

the area within the inner ring of boulevards on the Right Bank, the seventeenth century line of fortifications, was an almost impenetrable hive of

tenements and shops. Here in an area not twice the size of New York's Central Park, piled one above another in rooms or tiny apartments, lived more than a third of the city's one million inhabitants. The density of the population was higher than on the lower East Side of New York in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

The size of the city expanded enormously in the next two decades, especially in 1861, when the outlying suburbs were annexed to the existing twelve *arrondissements*, bringing the total to twenty, so that by 1870, an estimated 1.9 million people lived in an area that barely exceeded six miles at its widest diameter.

Yet in physical and logistical terms, the city could scarcely support such a large population. In 1851, the year Louis Napoleon performed his coup, Paris had still been an agglomeration of largely medieval villages. Its boundaries scarcely extended beyond the old eighteenth-century "General Farmers' Wall," at whose sixty gates the city taxes (*octroi*) were imposed on all goods entering the capital. The city's narrow, winding streets, its dark caverns of houses crammed together with open sewers running alongside, were virtually impossible for visitors to negotiate, and many parts were unknown even to native Parisians.

In the face of these problems of congestion and sanitation, Louis Napoleon undertook a massive rebuilding program, assigning the task in 1853 to Baron Georges Haussmann, the prefect of the Seine department who became, under the Second Empire, the virtual ruler of Paris. Over the course of seventeen years, Haussmann cleared and enlarged the narrow streets, opening them up to create wide boulevards with sweeping vistas and immense squares whose great expanses made the capital one of the civic splendors of the world. Parisians who had formerly lived, worked, and met all their needs within their immediate neighborhood, as Balzac and Eugène Sue portrayed them in their novels, now had easy access to the central areas of the city.

But beautification, mobility, and improved sanitary conditions were not the only motivations that impelled Haussmann and Louis Bonaparte. The highly congested Parisian neighborhoods had been notorious hotbeds of sedition and insurrection, and the narrow streets in the working-class neighborhoods were famously suited for the construction of barricades in periods of insurrection. Between 1827 and 1849, in a span of a single generation, barricades had been reared eight times in the eastern half of the city; in 1830 and twice more in 1848, they had been used in insurrections. That the city was physically congenial to insurgency had been a source of vexation to regime after regime. The problem had been raised in the Chamber of Deputies as long ago as the rising of the *Saisons* in 1839 and as recently as the street fighting of 1851; indeed, some measures had already been taken to push wider streets into the



most intractable of the working-class areas. There can be little doubt, as Haussmann himself attests in his memoirs, that the Bonapartist regime straightened, widened, and lengthened the streets and boulevards of Paris so that it could more effectively deploy its artillery and cavalry against barricades. With extraordinary determination and sometimes guile, Haussmann transformed Paris into a city that was not only remarkably beautiful but that was far more defensible against future insurgencies.

To perform the massive construction work required to rebuild the city, Haussmann brought in from the provinces thousands of unskilled workers, or *gras métiers* (as distinguished from skilled artisans), who added greatly to the restiveness of the Parisian working class. Moreover, the reconstruction worsened rather than improved working-class housing, exacerbating workers' anger and militancy; indeed, by tearing down their hovels and entire districts, it produced an upward spiral of rents that ultimately forced the removal of many to new slums in annexed suburban areas. These changes were not without their political consequences: in the 1860s many cities in France began to return republican deputies to the Corps Législatif, where they joined the opposition of bourgeois critics to Louis Napoleon. Despite the high esteem in which the French bourgeoisie held their free-trading English counterparts, they had long been nurtured in protectionism, and they now tended to blame every setback in the French economy on trade agreements that Louis Napoleon had signed with Britain to lower tariffs. Indeed, many industries, particularly small firms, openly criticized the emperor's policies for their mounting economic difficulties. As rumblings against the government mounted in the Corps Législatif, the liberal deputies began to demand more participation for the middle classes in state affairs, with the result that the imperial government had to face discontent by all but the most reactionary social classes in the realm.

As the 1860s drew to an end, great cracks were opening in the Empire's façade and challenges to the government were everywhere on the increase. The huge debts that Bonaparte had piled up to make possible his massive infrastructure and reconstruction projects were destabilizing the economy without increasing the productive capacity of the country, as were the emperor's costly war against Russia in the Crimea and his futile imperialist adventures in Mexico (from which French troops were evicted in 1867 by a combination of Benito Juárez's peon armies and American pressure). Money that went into roads and urban development was money that did not go into industry as a whole, lining the pockets of French financiers without dramatically advancing industrial development.

Moreover, the end of the building boom in the late 1860s left thousands of workers unemployed, and the heavy bank speculation in real estate that had partly underwritten Haussmann's civic improvements led to the virtual collapse of the financial structure. In 1868 France slipped into an economic crisis that,

although relatively mild, was the most serious the Empire had experienced. Credit tightened up, the reckless financial improvisations of the previous decade came to an end, and the French bourgeoisie beat a quick retreat to what Tom Kemp has called its traditional system of "orthodox finance." By withholding funds from the state or else charging it high interest rates, the bankers now "staged a kind of strike against the régime as the expression of [their] disapproval."<sup>2</sup>

Bonaparte's response to these difficulties was typical of his temporizing policies: in 1868 he put an end to the economic and imperialist adventurism that had previously characterized his régime's behavior and converted the "Authoritarian Empire" into what has been called the "Liberal Empire," essentially creating a limited monarchy under the premiership of the liberal deputy Emile Ollivier. The Corps Législatif now became an increasingly authentic parliamentary forum in which deputies openly challenged policies of the emperor's ministers—challenges that found their way into an ever-freer press and that were echoed in open public meetings and discussions. Indeed, a critical republican opposition, which had been emerging since the mid-1860s, now crystallized around three flamboyant deputies: Léon Gambetta, Jules Favre, and Jules Ferry. Even the archreactionary Orleanist Adolphe Thiers prudently aided the opposition with advice and votes when he deemed it politically expedient to do so.

The emperor's declining status in the country can be judged by the election results for the Corps Législatif since 1857. In that year only seven opposition candidates had been elected to the chamber; only a few years later, in 1863, this number leaped to thirty-five; and by 1869, the last election prior to Louis Napoleon's abdication, opposition deputies soared to ninety-three. In this last election, all the large cities—Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles—returned deputies for the opposition; in Paris the opposition got 234,000 votes, to the government's paltry 70,000. In 1868, to lessen public discontent, the nervous government further liberalized press controls, and before the year was out, 140 new periodicals mushroomed in the capital alone, including *Le Rappel* (an unmistakably militant name), with a circulation of at least 120,000. Finally, the 1860s witnessed the revival of the socialist left and the labor movement and the reactivation of the secret societies, many of which were Blanquist and Jacobin in their orientation, leading to conspiracies to overthrow the régime, even to assassinate the emperor. To ease working-class hostility, the government completely legalized trade unions in 1864, whereupon the ever-zealous Eugène Varlin toured the country in a campaign to establish combative working-class associations, or *sociétés de résistance* (as distinguished from the fairly tepid trade councils, or *chambres syndicales*, favored by the Proudhonist mutualists).

Although he was always deferential to the bourgeoisie, Louis Napoleon



varied his policies toward the workers, allowing for reforms that were often followed by acts of repression. In the 1860s, as we have seen, he courted the workers in order to countervail the demands of the bourgeoisie, on the hopeful assumption that the workers had abandoned their bloody insurrectionary course of June 1848. Yet despite the legalization of unions, men of Varlin's stripe were frequently arrested and sent to prison or to exile in North Africa. In March 1868 fifteen leaders of the Paris bureau of the International were tried and convicted, followed two months later by a second trial, and still a third one in June 1870. The International had been banned and its members were ruthlessly persecuted by the police—in fact, by the last year of the Empire, it was effectively suppressed. Varlin was obliged to seek refuge in Belgium, where he ceaselessly attacked the regime and tried, even from a distance, to strengthen the French working-class opposition to the regime.

These feverish shifts in the emperor's policy earned him only the contempt of nearly all classes in France; indeed, by 1869, the Bonapartist system was on the brink of toppling. Louis Napoleon was a sick man—physically (due to a massive kidney stone) as well as politically, and his regime was clouded by economic instability, a restless working class, and a dissatisfied bourgeoisie. It was haunted by financial scandals and painful defeats, most recently his humiliating failure to turn Mexico into a colony.

Moreover, despite his thirst for "glory" and his incongruous posturing over a decaying regime, the emperor was afflicted with a bumbling and sclerotic officer corps and an army that, despite costly military expenses, was ill trained and, by comparison with the developments in weaponry that were being made elsewhere, especially in Prussia, poorly armed. The French *chassepôt* rifle, to be sure, was immensely superior in range and accuracy to the Prussian needle gun, but the emperor's army had not advanced appreciably in heavy equipment beyond the 1840s. Where the Prussian artillery, thanks to Alfred Krupp, was the most advanced in Europe, Prussian logistics and training made the French army, despite its celebrated *élan*, seem almost amateurish by comparison. Prussian officers, although less colorful and dashing than their French counterparts, were typically efficient, and the Prussian cavalry was perhaps the most superbly trained in Europe, certainly far more able to reconnoiter enemy terrain than the French. The "Iron Chancellor" of the Prussian-dominated North German Confederation, Otto von Bismarck, having already united many of the northern German states under a Prussian king, was only too eager to establish a still more powerful German empire by annexing the long-cherished territories of Alsace and Lorraine, which were under French rule.

## VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE!

That Bismarck wanted a war with France can hardly be doubted. All his geopolitical aspirations demanded it. Filled with pride in their country's economic expansion and Prussian military efficiency, the north Germans regarded France as effete, even dissolute, and disdained her pretensions to leadership of the European continent as archaic. Louis Napoleon, in turn, was eager to restore national unity by using war to mobilize popular support for his throne. But the French were by no means enthusiastic about engaging the Germans; indeed, even reactionaries like Thiers feared for the ability of the military, led principally by the intransigent monarchist Marshal MacMahon, to take on the more able Prussian army.

For Bismarck, the question of war with France was simply how to provoke one. The opportunity came as a result of an affront that France suffered, or seemed to suffer, at the hands of Prussia in a dynastic quarrel in Spain. In July 1870 the Spaniards had had enough of their bumbling queen, Isabella II, and called upon the Hohenzollern rulers of Prussia to provide them with a new sovereign. The Prussians were delighted to oblige, anticipating the wealth and power that a dynastic alliance with Spain would bring. Following a series of secret negotiations, Prince Leopold of Sigmaringen, a Hohenzollern notable, was made available. But the prospect of a Hohenzollern dynasty on the other side of the Pyrenees was not only a slap in France's face, it seemed to open the French southern flank to Prussian encirclement. Indeed, in Paris's eyes, for the Prussians to try to extend their influence to France's southern frontier was absolutely intolerable.

After much diplomatic maneuvering, in the course of which the prince withdrew his own candidacy, the French issued a virtual ultimatum stipulating that Leopold would never be allowed to sit on the Spanish throne. Although the Prussian king's telegram in reply to the ultimatum was fairly tepid, Bismarck shrewdly reworded it to make it appear that the king had rebuffed the French ambassador. He then released the doctored telegram to the press, knowing it would provoke the French. The French, confident of their military superiority over the Prussians, allowed themselves to be infuriated by this manufactured snub, and on July 19, 1870, Louis Bonaparte declared war on the Prussian-controlled North German Confederation. As French troops marched out of Paris, jubilant crowds lined the streets, certain that a vibrant Gallic military would surely rout the dour Teutons.

Their hopes were grossly misplaced. Within weeks, the poorly mobilized French armies, led by incompetent generals who lacked any realistic offensive strategy against the well-coordinated Prussian forces, were surrounded. Where Bismarck's well-trained infantry and ubiquitous Uhlan cavalry did not crush them, they fled in a near panic. By August 7, news reached Paris that the



Prussians had pushed back both Generals MacMahon and Frossard, resulting on August 9 in an angry demonstration before the Palais Bourbon, where the Corps Législatif was obliged to protect itself with troops against its own citizens. With a crisis at hand, the ministry was changed, with Thiers installed at its head. But now outraged, even defiant calls to replace the empire with a republic and save France from the Prussians were heard throughout the city, redolent of past revolutionary situations and insurrections.

In mid-August Blanquist hotheads decided that the time was ripe for another putsch and called upon Blanqui himself to return to Paris from his refuge in Brussels. Their plan was, first, to attack the barracks of the Villette fire station, where the firemen had stored a number of rifles, and with arms in hand to arouse the people in the streets against the government. Inasmuch as the fire station and barracks were located in a radical working-class district, the Blanquists naively thought the residents would instantly rise up and rally to their support. From there they would capture other key points in the city and march on the center of Paris. Blanqui, recalling the defeats he had suffered earlier, objected to the plan, warning that the time was still not propitious for an uprising—but he was overruled by his followers and was obliged to yield to their wishes.

On August 14, armed with little more than a handful of revolvers and daggers, the putschists and perhaps a hundred supporters launched their attack on the barracks—only to be met with a refusal by the firemen to surrender their weapons. The Blanquists withdrew, mindful of Blanqui's injunction against spilling any blood in the attack, and proceeded down the Boulevard Villette toward the Belleville district, shouting "Long live the Republic!" and "To arms!" to a startled crowd along the way. Needless to say, hardly anyone responded to their cries. The "uprising" was patently a fiasco, and its initiators scattered before either the police or the troops could arrive in force. Two were captured and sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment after a number of notable Parisians called for administrative clemency. The Villette fiasco definitively revealed the failure of Blanquist putschism. Without trying to garner mass support for their tiny conspiracy, Blanqui's elitist followers were simply stranded. Parisians had understandably remained unmoved when a small group of revolutionaries, planning behind their backs, tried suddenly to stir them into an adventurist action. But the putsch also provided the authorities with an excuse to crack down on the entire revolutionary movement in Paris, which they did with all the energy at their disposal.

With the revolutionary movement in retreat, the privileged classes found they had little to fear but their Bonapartist emperor. Even this problem was resolved when, on September 2, the last of the operational French armies—107,000 troops—capitulated to the Prussian army at Sedan, and the ailing and listless

emperor, who accompanied rather than led them, gave his sword over to the Prussian king. The cities of Strasbourg and Metz managed to hold out longer against the German juggernaut and were duly besieged. But Louis Napoleon was now Bismarck's prisoner, a shock that, back in Paris, threw the Corps Législatif into an uproar. The proclamation of a republic now seemed unavoidable, but both Orleanists and republicans tried in every way to delay it: the Orleanists were monarchists, still committed to an Orleans dynasty, and the republicans feared the Paris "mob," which was already demanding radical change.

On September 4, a demonstration with vague patriotic themes was planned for the Place de la Concorde, but the night before, the Blanquists, who still managed to retain an organized presence in Paris, combed the working-class quarters, fervently urging the workers and the National Guard to follow them, with arms in hand, in a popular insurrection the next day. Nor were the workers alone in taking to the streets; this time, the largely bourgeois National Guard, long neglected and humiliated by Louis Napoleon, joined them. Thus, on September 4, while the deputies were trying to decide on the future of the government, a huge crowd burst into the Palais Bourbon, with the Blanquists at their head, and demanded the immediate creation of a republican regime.

In a replay of the invasion of the Palais Bourbon in February 1848, Jules Favre acted out Lamartine's role as the reluctant republican leader. Although Favre was no last-minute convert to republicanism, as Lamartine had been, he clearly did not want the republic to be proclaimed in the heat of another insurrection, that is, when the workers might sweep the entire government away and possibly proclaim a social republic. To distract the invading crowd, the nervous Favre, aided by several deputies, once again led the workers and the National Guards in a march to the Hôtel de Ville to proclaim the republic, and once again, he and his procession found the Place de Grève filled with workers. The Hôtel was occupied by Jacobins and Blanquists who were already busily forming their own government, dropping from the windows to the crowd below lists of proposed names, including those of the old Jacobin Charles Delescluze, Blanqui, and the heady republican journalist Henri Rochefort, among other radical candidates. And like Lamartine before him, Favre, who had been a moderate republican in 1848, shyly proposed, to placate the radicals in the crowd, that until a permanent republican legislature could be established by national elections, a provisional Government of National Defense should be created, composed exclusively of the existing legislature's Parisian deputies—presumably in emulation of the "Mountain" of 1793. By seeming to promise the restoration of a Commune, the proposal quieted potential popular objections to the fact that such a government would in reality be filled with Orleanist deputies left over from the old regime. Finally, as if to complete the parody of February 1848, a younger republican, Léon Gambetta, persuaded the crowd in the Place de Grève to retain the tricolor in preference to



the red flag—a task that, in the wake of national military humiliation at Prussian hands, was not very difficult to achieve.

Gambetta's symbolic victory acquired political reality when the coterie established the Government of National Defense, politically not unlike the Provisional Government that had emerged from the February Revolution of 1848. The new government, working closely with the old monarchist and republican rump of the Corps Législatif—many of whose deputies had fled Paris for the safety of their respective departments—immediately set about to eliminate the potential for further revolutionary changes. Installed at the head of the government was a dour Breton, General Jules Trochu, who was not only a devout Catholic but a firm Legitimist. His political beliefs alone would hardly have made him acceptable to working-class Parisians. But because he had had the foresight to criticize the army for its unpreparedness—even before the war—he had been rewarded with the military governorship of Paris and, known to be a mild man, was fairly popular with the crowd.

The real leaders of the government, however, were Favre and Gambetta. As vice-president and minister of foreign affairs, Favre was situated to negotiate an armistice with the Prussians, which he was only too eager to do to restore normality in France. Gambetta, whose militant republicanism made him popular with the crowd, was given the equally strategic Ministry of Interior, from which he ostensibly "republicanized" France by appointing men of republican sympathies to the departmental prefectures as well as the Paris mairies. Ernest Picard, a major opposition leader in the Corps Législatif, became minister of finance; General LeFlô was selected for the Ministry of Defense, and Étienne Arago, the aging playwright who had headed the Paris Post Office in 1848, was made the mayor of Paris. Still another remnant of 1848, Garnier-Pagès, also found his way into the government. Less known to the public was Pierre Dorian, an industrialist who apparently prided himself on his good labor relations and his efficiency; he became the minister of works, a position largely concerned with fortifying the capital. The prefecture of the police was given to Edmund Adam who, in time, proved a fairly honorable man in a dubious crew of nafs and cynics.

As a concession to the Left, Favre and Gambetta appointed Rochefort to a sinecure position in the government. A prominent opposition journalist during the Second Empire, Rochefort had opened his newspaper, *La Marseillais*, to Blanquist and Jacobin writers; moreover, he had the distinction of being imprisoned for his oppositional activities under Bonaparte and had just now been freed by the rebellious crowd. But it speaks volumes about the provisional government that it even offered a post to Adolphe Thiérs, the aging counterrevolutionary reprobate of Louis-Philippe's reign. At a time of potential danger to his person, however, this architect of counterrevolution and notorious coward discreetly refused any post and professed to withdraw into political retirement.

To the bitter disappointment of the socialists, Jacobins, and Blanquists, the February Revolution of 1848 seemed to be replaying itself. Once again the moderates had, by deft manipulation, trickery, and persuasion, captured the power from the popular movement. Bitterly, the old Jacobin writer Delescluze remarked to a friend that evening, "We are lost."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, as Samuel Bernstein points out, "Except in décor, the government was not a sharp departure from the Liberal Empire" of the 1860s. In fact, several of the government members, in 1848, had contributed to the destruction of the Second Republic: "Favre, for example, had drafted the decree ordering the deportation, without trial, of the June insurgents; and Garnier-Pagès had been the author of the ill-starred supertax of forty-five centimes."<sup>4</sup> Marx put it well when he wrote that the Government of National Defense neither replaced the monarchy nor introduced social measures of worth, but merely occupied Louis Bonaparte's vacant throne in the guise of republicanism.

## PARIS UNDER SIEGE

The military defeat that France had just suffered was as total as it was unexpected. Once the emperor surrendered his sword in September, Prussian armies moved rapidly toward Paris, a move for which the capital was woefully unprepared. Of the regular army, only 60,000 effectives remained in Paris, along with 100,000 Mobile Guards who were now ill-trained reserves or "territorials" from the provinces, and a miscellany of police, firemen, and sailors. Short of an outright surrender of the capital, a Prussian siege was unavoidable.

Yet even as Prussian artillery moved ever closer to Paris, the significant event, for the citizens of the capital, seems to have been less the danger of the military defeat than the new prospects opened by the fall of the imperial regime. A heady air of expectancy buoyed up the city—another republic had been created, this time bloodlessly, and a carnival of fraternity prevailed. To be sure, patriotism and wartime chauvinism also infected Parisians—even Blanqui succumbed to it and called for unity among all Frenchmen, if need be at the expense of social conflict, editing a newspaper called *La Patrie en danger*. But in the main, Parisians seem to have assumed that the fall of Louis Napoleon had been the fulfillment of the Prussians' own military goals as well as the consummation of their own wishes.

In fact, this was not at all the case. The Prussians were seeking France's complete humiliation and a sizable chunk of French territory. As the weeks went by, reality set in for the Parisians, and faced with the danger of a siege, the National Guard ballooned from 20,000 into a huge force of 350,000 in Paris



alone. Once again, as in 1848, the Guard was opened up to all able-bodied men, including large contingents of workers, who received a franc and a half a day for their service and, as tradition dictated, had the right to elect their own officers. Moreover, Paris was very well fortified: surrounding the city was a thirty-foot wall, outside of which was a moat and, spaced at strategic intervals, sixteen powerful forts, each mounted with fifty to seventy heavy guns that could rain fire on much of the surrounding landscape. About 3000 cannons of varying types were available for the city's defense, many of them purchased by popular subscription, with funds contributed by the workers and middle classes.

Trochu saw to it that the city was as well provisioned as possible for a siege. Inside the city walls sheep by the thousands were permitted to graze on any open spaces that were not under cultivation, from the Bois de Boulogne to the small plazas. Cattle roamed everywhere. Farmers brought their vegetables and poultry into the capital, not only to feed Parisians but to prevent the Prussians from living off the land. The Tuileries became an artillery emplacement, factories were converted to cannon foundries, and the Louvre was emptied of art treasures and transformed into an arsenal. With all these preparations, it seemed certain that Paris could hold out against the Prussians almost indefinitely, with the result that the city was flooded with foreign tourists as well as provincials. The looming siege thus took on the air of an exciting festival rather than a painful ordeal.

Finally, on September 20, the Prussian armies completed their encirclement, or investment, of the capital, and the siege was under way in earnest. But apart from skirmishes and some artillery duels, initially the two armies scarcely engaged each other. In fact, it is entirely possible that the Prussians might have succumbed to a concerted, well-planned, and resolute offensive, had the French launched one early on, when they were still positioning themselves around the city. But no such undertaking was mounted. Rather, a siege mentality pervaded the government's thinking; far from mounting an offensive against the Prussians, the government eagerly hoped to reach an armistice with them. The Government of National Defense was already betraying a greater fear of its own armed people—particularly the workers—than of the artillery and infantry of the invaders it was expected to repel.

Although by their behavior most Parisian bourgeois exhibited little serious inclination to resist the Prussians, they bombastically declaimed their refusal to allow "even one inch" of French territory to pass to the enemy. It was generally assumed that some other military force would eventually rally to the capital's defense, most likely one gathered from the provinces. To organize such a force, an extension of the government was established some distance from Paris, in Tours, known as the Delegation of Tours. There was also some hope that a foreign power, such as England, might come to the aid of Paris and bring the insufferable

investment of Europe's most glorious city to its rightful end. Favre and Thiers all but begged the English to provide assistance, even invoking the danger of a possible "red revolt" by an enemy more terrifying than even the Prussians, namely the revolutionary elements of the working class. But the Prussians had sufficiently intimidated Europe with their victory over the French to render international aid to Paris implausible, assuming it was ever contemplated.

In contrast to the passivity and defeatism of the government, the workers—or at least their most socially conscious leaders—were determined not to surrender the capital to the Prussians. On the contrary, they were eager to defend the new republic—the fruit of the most recent of France's revolutions—to the bitter end if necessary. With understandable suspicion, they regarded the government, with all its passivity, as treacherous and demanded that Paris continue to resist by calling a *levée en masse*, or general mobilization and arming of the population, such as the Jacobins had done in 1793. This demand was forcefully articulated on September 5, a day after the formation of the new government, when a delegation met with Gambetta at the Hôtel de Ville. Composed of members of the Paris Council of the IWMA, the Trade Union Federation (a loosely formed group of *chambres syndicales*), and a miscellany of socialists, the delegation's demands were not limited only to the military situation. In fact they bluntly called for municipal elections (stirring memories of the Commune of 1792-93) and, even more disturbingly, the substitution of the National Guard for the police, complete freedom of speech and the press, and the election of all judges.

Gambetta received them politely, but he was conspicuously evasive in his response. The next day the International, together with the trade unions, convened a meeting that was attended by 400 to 500 people. This meeting called upon Parisians to establish a defense and vigilance committee (so redolent of similar committees in the Great Revolution) in each of the twenty *arrondissements*. The committees, in turn, were to be coordinated by a Republican Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements for National Defense, consisting of four elected delegates from each local vigilance committee. These committees were duly formed over the next few days, under a Central Committee headed by Eugène Varlin. Significantly, the Central Committee met in the same building—a hall in the Rue de la Corderie—that housed the International and the Trade Union Federation and in time became a center for the most revolutionary tendencies in Paris. With the support of the unions, the Central Committee would virtually turn the "Corderie" (as it was called) into a dual power against the Government of National Defense.

Nor were the Committee and its supporters without a radical program. On September 15, members of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements issued a proclamation that was posted on the walls of Paris, listing the full range of its demands.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the demands of September 5, it called



for a complete inventory of all the essential commodities in the city, and demanded that these goods be shared equitably among the people according to need. Moreover, it called for the arming of all citizens (including the provision of ammunition), for placing the police under popular control, and for housing for all, including the "appropriation" of all empty apartments and buildings for "various defence services." Without explicitly using the language of the Great Revolution, it called for "national delegates" to be sent out to the departments, with functions similar to those of the old Representatives on Mission of 1793.

The government, fearful that the terror of 1793-94 would return—this time as a "red" specter, with an implicit challenge to property and exploitation—clearly viewed the Prussians as the lesser enemy and began to extend feelers for an armistice. In fact Favre, as the foreign minister, had already called for an armistice shortly after the Government of National Defense was established. On September 18, he secretly met with Bismarck, only to find the Prussian terms so demanding that he rode back to Paris in complete despair. Not only would Prussia require France to cede Alsace, parts of Lorraine, and Metz, as well as provide a huge indemnity, but even during the siege itself, Favre was warned, Paris would no longer have access to outside provisions unless the government gave up Strasbourg and permitted the Prussians to occupy Mont-Valérien, the massive French fort to the west of the city walls. The news of these terms incited widespread protests in the capital, and on September 20 the Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements sent a delegation to the Hôtel de Ville to make known its objections to any armistice with the hated invaders. Even the ever-resourceful Thiers failed to persuade the Prussians to preserve French honor in the peace terms; indeed, he encountered the same difficulties that confronted Favre.

In the fall of 1870, the people of Paris stood firm against the Prussians—although very much alone. On October 7, in the hope of mobilizing support from the rest of France for the defense of the capital, Gambetta left for Tours in a hot-air balloon (this was the only way he could cross the Prussian lines) to head the government's delegation there. Taking over the ministry of war from the elderly Crémieux, he bestowed the delegation's somnolent members with his usual bluster and energy and tried to mobilize new troops from the provinces to create an Army of the Loire. But until this force could prove itself to be effective in the field, Paris was still isolated militarily and politically. Indeed, to many of its citizens, it seemed that the city would be left to function as a sovereign municipality in its own right.

But what political structure would such a sovereign municipality have? Would it continue to be led by a politically mixed group of leaders who were committed to capitulation to the Prussians, as well as to a counterrevolutionary domestic agenda? Or would it be a Commune, revived for the first time since the Great Revolution, with a municipal council of elected representatives? Or

would it be a direct democracy of the more radical kind, like the sectional democracy of 1793, which had variously supported and later opposed the old Commune?

The Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements now became the arena for a debate over the nature of the prospective Commune. With the support of many Blanquists, Gustave Lefrançois, one of the committee's most militant and socialistic members, bluntly demanded that a future Commune be structured around a direct democracy like that of 1793. The defense and vigilance committee of the eighteenth arrondissement declared in *Le Combat* of September 21 that "the quarters are the fundamental base of the democratic Republic,"<sup>6</sup> thereby voicing a radical demand for mass democracy and the possible reconstruction of the old sections. In the end, however, moderates on the Central Committee succeeded in toning down this proposal: the final version, as published in *Le Combat* of October 5, simply called upon citizens to use their local assemblies as vehicles for the election of members to a citywide Municipal Council: "at your public meetings, in your arrondissement committees, in your National Guard battalions, right now you must select the men most worthy to represent you at the Hôtel de Ville."<sup>7</sup> The proposal was not received enthusiastically by the Corderie—the International, the Trade Union Federation, and the National Guard Central Committee—but the idea of a Commune structured around sectional assemblies faded permanently from the political horizon.

October, however, was to be filled with continued demonstrations and stormy events. On October 5, a young National Guard officer named Gustave Flourens (who had written an account of an ideal society in which "men, freed from their chains, governed themselves"<sup>8</sup>) led a march of Guard battalions to the Hôtel de Ville, where he repeated the demands for a *levée en masse*, municipal elections, and a fair distribution of rations in the besieged city, only to be pleasantly escorted out by the government, which made no commitments. This escapade was followed three days later (October 8) by a demonstration, held by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, to demand municipal elections. As yet, few Parisians responded to the call, and the turnout was embarrassingly meager. Delighted by this failure, the government used the opportunity to ban demonstrations and postpone municipal elections until the siege was lifted, but as Stewart Edwards puts it, the defense and vigilance committees "were constantly crossing the border between active attempts to 'aid' the Government in conducting the defence and attempts to supplant the official administration because it was not vigorous enough" in pursuing the war.<sup>9</sup> By now it was only a matter of time before these small skirmishes would give rise to a major clash between the government and its radical critics.

The occasion for the clash was provided, in part, by the surrender of Metz



to its Prussian besiegers. With nearly a 100,000 troops under his command, Marshal Bazaine had been quietly sitting out the siege of the city by surrounding Prussian forces. A Bonapartist general, the marshal detested the republic, and when Louis Napoleon surrendered at Sedan, he had made little effort even to engage the Prussians, let alone raise the siege. Finally, on October 27, after seventy days, he capitulated to his besiegers—an act that freed an entire Prussian army to reinforce the siege of Paris and engage in operations against growing French provincial resistance. Everywhere across the French political spectrum, the cry of "treachery" went up—not only from the Left but from Gambetta himself, who openly denounced Bazaine as a traitor.

To exacerbate an already turbulent situation, at the end of October the government announced not only the fall of Metz but the news that Thiers was traveling abroad once again to seek an armistice with Bismarck. However much the announcement may have pleased the bourgeoisie, which was eager to return to businesslike normality, the news sent a shock wave through the city. The prospect of Paris falling as Metz had just done, of a Bazaine surrender followed by a Thiers armistice, was intolerable to the infuriated working and lower-middle classes, who alone seemed prepared to defend France against Prussian aggression.

At length, at midday on October 31, about 150,000 Parisians, many of them National Guards, gathered in the Place de Grève in pouring rain, furiously denouncing the military setback and crying "No armistice!" and "Vive la Commune!" The demonstration was spontaneous and so large that the mayors of the capital's *arrondissements* hastened to the Hôtel de Ville to demand that the government call municipal elections, presumably to calm the situation and hold out hope to the demonstrators for the prospect of a Commune. The government, in turn, fearful that the huge demonstration would encourage radicals to take over the Hôtel de Ville, beat the *rappel* in the bourgeois districts of the capital, hopefully to rally the reliable or "good" battalions of the National Guard to its defense. But even these "good" battalions failed to respond. Indeed, it now seemed that almost everyone in Paris was fed up with the treachery of Trochu's coterie in the Hôtel de Ville, if not the entire Government of National Defense.

For his part, the hot-headed Gustave Flourens decided that the demonstration had created an opportunity for establishing a Commune. Despite the objections of his more prudent fellow officers, he took it upon himself to rally his Belleville battalions of the National Guard—they included a contingent of sharpshooters equipped at his own expense with *chassepôt* rifles—in an advance on the Hôtel de Ville, clearly with the intention of deposing the existing government and replacing it with a revolutionary Commune composed of, among others, Delescluze, Blanqui, the radical republican Félix Pyat, the

socialist Jean-Baptiste Millière, and, oddly, Victor Hugo (who declined the honor as soon as he learned of it).

Meanwhile in the early afternoon, a rumor—wrong, as it turned out—spread among the demonstrators that Mayor Arago had consented to call municipal elections and that Trochu would be replaced as president of the government by Pierre Dorian, the more popular minister of works. Viewing the concession on municipal elections as a victory, the crowd now began to disperse, and the situation once again seemed under control. Suddenly Flourens and his sharpshooters burst into the room in the Hôtel de Ville where the government was meeting, leaped up on to the long baize table around which the members were seated, and flamboyantly began to march up and down, his spurs tearing the fabric. He firmly demanded the formation of a Commune, to which he gave the chilling name Committee of Public Safety, and he furnished the ministers with his list of committee members. In their eyes, the names Blanqui and Delescluze might just as well have been Robespierre and Saint-Just.

At six-thirty Blanqui, learning that he had been anointed for the new Commune, very reluctantly appeared at the Hôtel de Ville but with his usual decisiveness quickly sat down to write decrees, requisitioning food and closing the city's gates, lest the Prussians take advantage of the disarray in the city and attack. When the remaining members arrived—Delescluze, Millière, and Pyat, among others—it seemed that a "red republic" had indeed been established, with Blanqui and Delescluze at the helm. But as it turned out, the appearance was entirely deceptive and provided the occasion that the government needed to strike back at the Parisian Left.

The table upon which Flourens was striding collapsed when a defender of the government leaped up to challenge him. In the general melee that followed, Trochu, as well as other ministers, escaped from the room and, making their way to the Louvre, where their panicky supporters were assembling, laid plans to retake the Hôtel de Ville. In the meantime, the news that the city hall had been seized by "the reds" galvanized middle-class opinion in favor of the government. By early evening contingents of "good" bourgeois National Guards appeared before the Hôtel de Ville and demanded of Delescluze, who had come out to parley, that the building be evacuated. In return, they said that the government's promise to hold municipal elections would be scrupulously kept. Delescluze returned inside to tell his fellow insurgents of the proposal and persuade them to leave. Meanwhile Mobile Guards, who had been brought to the scene by the government, infiltrated the building by passing through a little-known subterranean passageway from a nearby barracks. The would-be Commune established by Flourens was now in a hopeless situation, facing hostile National Guards outside the building and mobiles within.

Peace was finally established when the government agreed to call municipal



elections the very next day and promised to take no reprisals against the confused insurgents. This agreement was vouchsafed by Jules Ferry and Adam, the police prefect. Finally, at three o'clock on the morning of November 1, the leaders of both sides amiably walked out of the city hall arm in arm—Blanqui with General Tamasier (the commander of the National Guard), Delescluze with Doran, and so forth—each insurgent linked with a military or government leader. After politely shaking hands with their opposites in the nearly empty Place de Grève, the insurgents wisely hastened to the Belleville, there to find safety from the reprisals that were certain to follow if the government broke its agreement.

## THE WINTER OF REACTION

Needless to say, less than twenty-four hours after the agreement was made, the government broke it. Before Prefect Adam was even awake the next morning, a ruthless crackdown against the insurgents was under way. Orders were issued for the immediate arrest of Blanqui, Delescluze, Pyat, Flourens, and Millière, among others. (Blanqui managed to elude the authorities for several months, as did his second in command, Gustave Tridon, and the future leader of the Blanquists in the 1880s, Edouard Vaillant.)

Creditably, Adam angrily resigned his post in protest over this breach of promise. He was replaced by a far less honorable police prefect, Cresson, who proceeded to ferret out insurgent leaders. Rochefort also resigned, as could have been expected, while the honorable General Tamasier turned in his command of the National Guard. He was replaced by the reactionary General Clément Thomas, who promptly cashiered sixteen of the more radical Guard commanders. On November 3, almost as an afterthought, the government defaulted on its promise to hold municipal elections by conducting a mere vote of confidence. In this Bonaparte-style plebiscite, it received 560,000 affirmative votes as against 63,000 negative ones. The plebiscite was followed the next day by an election simply for *arrondissement* mayors—and beyond these steps the government refused to budge.

With the failure of the October 31 insurgency at the Hôtel de Ville, the influence of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements quickly waned, and the members of the defense and vigilance committees disappeared into their respective republican, Jacobin, and Blanquist clubs, which for their part underwent a sudden revival. Clubs such as the Club des Montagnards and Club de la Patrie en Danger (both Blanquist) and the Club de la Commune (Jacobin) replaced the *arrondissement* committees and the public assemblies that had grown up around them. In a sense, the Parisian militants were

becoming more politicized and revolutionary, a change that would not become evident until the beginning of 1871.

In the meantime, the pressure mounted on Trochu, as commander of the defense of Paris, to carry out an offensive against the Prussians, who seemed to be waiting patiently for the siege to starve the city into submission. This pressure was inspired in part by Gambetta's efforts to raise an army in the provinces, efforts that were now showing some success. On November 9, in an engagement against Bavarian forces, his troops won the first French victory in the war, recapturing the city of Orleans. Indeed, had the cavalry pressed its advantage over the retreating Prussian forces, the French army might very well have routed them completely.

As much as the news of Gambetta's success delighted Paris, it threw Trochu's own plans for a military offensive into disarray. The general had massed a large army with considerable equipment in the northwestern part of the capital and planned to break through the Prussian lines—which were weak in this sector—and try to drive toward the Channel ports. But having captured Orleans in the south, Gambetta now demanded that Trochu link up his forces with those of the Army of the Loire, which required that Trochu transport all his troops and supplies across the city to the southwestern part of the capital—where the Prussians were very numerous and well entrenched. Nor could Trochu take the Prussians by surprise there: the movement of a large French army across an open city could easily be seen from the high ground outside the besieged capital.

On November 29, having obliged Gambetta and moved his troops and supplies to the southwest despite his own doubts, Trochu initiated a "great sortie" against the Prussian forces to the south. It was a disaster. Despite the undeniable courage of the French troops, everything seemed to work against them: the weather, which had swollen the Marne to flood level (which they then had to cross under Prussian fire), the lack of command coordination, the poor logistics, and the treacherous terrain, which gave the Prussians the high ground, all assured a complete rout. The fighting was bloody, presaging the kind of losses the French would suffer in the First World War—in only three days of combat, they lost some 12,000 men and officers. The results for the French were pitiful: the siege was still intact, and to add insult to injury, Orleans was soon recaptured by counterattacking Prussians, causing Gambetta to shift his government from Tours to Bordeaux, farther to the south of France.

With the arrival of the winter months, the siege of Paris now took its terrible toll in hunger, disease, and cold. Although wealthy Parisians still had access to premium foodstuffs, the poor, already accustomed to horsemeat, were reduced to eating dogs, cats, and even rats. So high were prices, especially of necessities, that Blanqui's newspaper, *La Patrie en danger*, folded on December 8, due in part to the limited resources of his subscribers.



Although few adults actually succumbed to outright starvation, long lines of small coffins, containing the bodies of children, moved in a steady train to the Père Lachaise cemetery.

Military failures now brought the Government of National Defense and the people of Paris into open conflict. The government was desperate for an armistice, in marked contrast to most Parisians, who astonishingly were still prepared to fight on against the Prussians. On December 21, compelled by popular opinion, Trochu launched a second "sortie" toward the northeast, this time in bitterly cold weather. This attack, too, failed miserably, at a cost of 2,000 casualties, removing whatever remaining confidence Parisians had in the government and especially in Trochu. On December 27, intensifying the demoralization that had settled into the city, the Prussians began to bombard Paris—barely a week after the failed sortie. For several weeks shells fell on the capital at the rate of 300 to 400 daily, mostly exploding in the Left Bank, where they did surprisingly little damage. Indeed, no more than 97 people were actually killed and 278 wounded, and by early January, Parisians were taking the bombardment in their stride, as a routine and virtually harmless assault.

What really plunged the city into despair was the lack of fuel. The winter of 1870-71 was the most brutal in memory, and virtually every tree in the parks and along the avenues of Paris was cut down to provide warmth. The weekly death rate from infections (principally smallpox, typhoid, and respiratory ailments) soared from 1,200 during the first week of the siege to 4,444 between January 14 and 21. The prestige of the Government of National Defense had reached its nadir, and it was only a matter of time before Parisian workers would try to replace it with a Commune. Indeed, on January 6 the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements plastered Paris with an *affiche rouge* (or "red poster"), declaring that "the Municipality or the Commune, whatever one chooses to call it, is the only salvation of the people, their only guarantee against destruction," and it closed with the call: "MAKE WAY FOR THE COMMUNE!"<sup>10</sup>

Anticipating that an uprising was in the offing, the blundering government cynically decided to bleed the National Guard by sending it out on a completely useless sortie. Having abandoned all hope of lifting the siege, the government had made no effort to train the Guards, whose main function had been crowd control, for combat in open warfare against a highly disciplined and well-officered foreign army. To send them out against the Prussians, who had already routed well-trained regular armies, was a transparent attempt to teach revolutionary Paris a bloody lesson. As one member of the government is quoted as declaring, "there must be a big sortie of the National Guard because opinion will only be appeased when there are 10,000 National Guards dead on the ground."<sup>11</sup>

Surprisingly, despite this lack of training, the National Guards were eager to take up arms against the enemy. Filled with patriotic and revolutionary ardor, they hoped to overcome the Prussians with an overwhelming "torrential" charge, or *sortie torrentielle*, sweeping them away by sheer force of numbers and bayoneted rifles. The sortie, directed against Buzenval, to the west of the city, began on January 19—and from the start, the Guards were badly coordinated and plagued by delays. They were faced with the logistical nightmare of getting as many as a 100,000 men across two narrow bridges. Within a short time, the attack degenerated into confusion. Ironically, only a few National Guard battalions were sent into the heat of battle, bourgeois units rather than popular ones. Once Trochu decided that the National Guard had had enough of combat and bloodshed, he quickly ordered them to retreat—an order that astonished the popular battalions, who had hardly had a chance to take on the Prussians. When it was noticed that most of the sortie's six hundred casualties were from the bourgeois units, the rumor spread that the bourgeois units had fought with heroism, while the popular units had behaved with cowardice—a falsehood that only contributed to divisiveness among the Guards and their overall anger toward Trochu and his government.

Ordinary Parisians, in turn, were infuriated by the fact that the Guards had scarcely been permitted to see battle. The government was more detested than ever, by nearly all sectors of popular opinion. In their outrage, the Jacobins of the Republican Alliance, led by veterans of 1848 such as Delescluze and Ledru-Rollin, even made sympathetic overtures to the largely Blanquist "reds" of Belleville and Montmartre, offering to join forces in a common alliance against the government. No such alliance was actually made, and the Belleville revolutionaries decided that the time for an uprising against the government was finally at hand.

On the night of January 21, a public meeting of Club de la Révolution in Montmartre solemnly vowed to take the Hôtel de Ville at noon on the following day. (The government had shifted its proceedings to the safety of the Louvre, but the Commune, it was felt, could not properly be proclaimed anywhere but in the city hall.) When other groups were told of this solemn oath, they responded warily; the International and the Trade Union Federation, convinced that the time was not right for a *journée*, did not join them, while the Republican Alliance, which opposed socialism, decided to content itself with making a plea for municipal elections. Even Blanqui kept his distance from the uprising, regarding the attack as hopeless, although he went to a café near the Hôtel de Ville to observe it, as did Delescluze elsewhere near the Place de Grève.

If the time for a full-scale uprising had not yet arrived, however, the idea did have a measure of popular support. So thoroughly disgusted was the population with the government that when the National Guard commander sounded the *rappel* summoning the Guards to come out against the uprising,



very few responded. At noon on January 22 the most radical Guard battalions showed up at the Place de Grève, not to defend the government but to take it over in alliance with the young Blanquists Vaillant and Théophile Ferré, and the Internationalist Benoît Malon. Not unexpectedly, the anarchist Louise Michel, an unfailing insurgent, also appeared in her customary National Guard uniform, with rifle in hand.

To guard the city hall, the government had left behind contingents of Mobile Guards within the building. These mobiles were not Parisians: deeply religious Catholics who barely spoke French, they had been recruited from Brittany and dutifully hated the atheistic, dissolute, and urbane Parisians. Barely had Vaillant, Ferré, and Malon's National Guards been reinforced by the radical battalions, when the mobiles suddenly opened fire from the windows—not only on the Guards but on everyone in sight, including bystanders. The murderous firing continued for a full half hour before it came to an end, leaving thirty dead and at least as many wounded. The National Guards tried to return their fire from neighboring houses but were completely routed.

Up to this point in the siege, no blood had been shed between Parisians, but at least two score workers had now been shot down by troops of the Government of National Defense, a toll that was impossible to overlook. So extreme was the polarization that civil war between the government and the people was now a realistic possibility. Immediately, General Joseph Vinoy, who had just replaced Trochu as commander of the Paris garrison, outlawed the clubs, suspended the newspapers of Delescluze and Puyi, and ordered the mass arrest of known and suspected revolutionaries. It was clear to all that the siege, if it continued, would lead to Parisians turning their weapons on each other. Accordingly, the next day Favre visited Bismarck at Versailles, where the German command was ensconced, and on January 28 the Government of National Defense put an end to the four-month siege by signing an ostensible armistice that was in fact a capitulation to the Prussian army. The siege was to be lifted, and Paris was to receive food and other provisions from outside, but at a price that was very high. The Government of National Defense was obliged to pay the Prussians an armistice indemnity of 200 million francs, followed by a full indemnity, whose amount would be set in formal peace negotiations. Paris was to surrender its perimeter forts, and a National Assembly was to be convened at Bordeaux within three weeks, to negotiate the final peace treaty with the Prussians. The French army was permitted to retain only one division within the walls of the capital. The National Guards were allowed to keep their arms, but only because, as Favre fully realized, any attempt to disarm them would certainly lead to an open civil war.

When the harsh terms of the armistice were made known, they infuriated the capital. Gambetta, who had been kept in the dark about the armistice negotiations and was still mobilizing the Army of the Loire, went into a rage;

after much soul-searching, he resigned, filled with hatred for the monarchists on whom he blamed the detestable agreement. The radical workers were equally outraged, which created a problem for the government, since the *arrondissements* had acquired so much political and administrative autonomy during the four months of the siege that the revolutionary sectors of Paris were now a force to be reckoned with, especially since the National Guard was still under arms. As Stewart Edwards notes:

The war ... had broken up the political forces of repression so greatly relied on by the highly centralized system of government in France. Instead the Paris population had begun to assert itself. It was also a population that was armed, and the National Guard did not feel it had been defeated. On the contrary, it was spoiling for a fight and needed little to turn it completely against a Government that was held to have betrayed the nation. This frustrated patriotism was important in providing a general animosity which extended to a wider section of the population than just the regular revolutionaries.<sup>12</sup>

The air in Paris was fraught with tension, and only by showing some understanding and making some concessions to the long-suffering working class could the powers in control of the city avoid a bloody confrontation with the masses.

## THE COMING STORM

No such understanding was shown or concessions made. Instead, the government set February 8 as the day for elections to the National Assembly, which would negotiate the final treaty. The Paris clubs were permitted to reopen only as electoral organizations, in order to present their Assembly candidates. Once again, as occurred so often in the past when Parisian radicalism became too menacing, the government tried to counter it by holding Assembly elections, which would invariably permit the peasants to determine the policy of the country. This time the peasantry would be joined by many members of the lower middle class, who had had all they could take of the war.

The voting results were as disastrous as they had been in April 1848, and far worse than even the most pessimistic Parisian revolutionaries could have anticipated. Out of 675 deputies, the country at large returned about 400 Legitimists and Orléanists. Despite the fact that France was a republic, only 150 authentic republican deputies were elected. Far from recognizing the legitimate complaints and needs of the Parisian working classes, rural France took its



revenge on them by filling the Assembly with upper-class reactionaries and bourgeois elements.

Not even Paris as a whole acquitted itself well. Parisian voters accorded Louis Blanc the single largest number of votes, followed by Victor Hugo, Garibaldi (who had fought in support of France against Prussia), Edgar Quinet (a romantic nationalist), Gambetta, Rochefort, Delescluze, Ledru-Rollin, Millière, and the Proudhonist Jérôme Langlois. Of the "revolutionary socialist slate" put forth by the "Corderie"—namely the International in alliance with the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements (as the guiding body of the vigilance committees was now renamed)—the only candidates elected to the Assembly were those whose names also appeared on the slates of other groups, such as Garibaldi, Gambon, Pyat, Tolain, and Malon. Blanqui, the most important of the socialist nominees, received only 50,000 votes—which was not enough to earn him even the last place in the list of Parisian deputies to the Assembly. Although Thiers received a deservedly low vote in Paris, he headed the list in twenty-six provincial departments of the country.

The National Assembly that convened at Bordeaux on February 13 was not only reactionary but unruly and spiteful. It selected Thiers as chief of state, whereupon the old Orleanist formed a determinedly conservative government, composed of monarchists and, for decorative reasons, moderate republicans. So suffused was the Assembly with venom toward all liberal, let alone radical, deputies, that the moment Garibaldi tried to speak, the delegates rose from their seats and tried to silence him with shouts of "No Italian!" and "No Garibaldi!" When spectators in the chamber's galleries protested this treatment, they were rudely cleared from the chamber. Garibaldi, in turn, left with them and returned to Italy in sheer disgust.

Thereafter the Assembly, faced with Bismarck's February 19 deadline, turned to the issue of a peace treaty. It was hardly necessary for Thiers to warn the deputies that he would resign if the German terms were not met: the Assembly accepted the terms he had negotiated with little hesitation. These terms required France to give to Bismarck Alsace, Lorraine, Metz, and Strasbourg, as well as five billion gold francs as the full indemnity, and to permit the Germans to conduct a military parade through the French capital, as part of a token occupation of the city. Indeed, until the indemnity was paid in full, the German troops would occupy the northern part of France, including the outskirts of Paris. The treaty, with all these humiliating stipulations, was ratified by a staggering majority vote of 546 to 107.

The Assembly now turned its attention to Paris, with a degree of hostility that it had not shown toward the Prussians. To many rural deputies—or *ruraux*, as they were called—the capital was a far greater danger than a foreign occupying army. General d'Aurelle de Paladines, a violently anti-Parisian Bonapartist, was named as commander of the Paris National Guard,

and Blanqui and Flourens, among others, were sentenced to death for their roles in the October 31 uprising. Six left-wing journals were proscribed, and the one-and-a-half-franc daily wage for National Guard service was voided, a decision that would make it virtually impossible for working-class members to remain in the militia.

But the most provocative behavior of the Assembly—and, in terms of its own goal of quelling the Parisian workers, the stupidest—was the passage of a series of acts so punitive that they ultimately delivered over the most politically indifferent sectors of the lower middle classes, let alone the workers, to the Left. During the siege, the poorest of the poor had been obliged, to keep themselves alive, to deposit goods (often little more than mattresses and the scissors of seamstresses) in the state-run pawnshop, *Mont de Piété*. To protect these items, a moratorium had been placed on the selling of unredeemed goods. The Assembly, with insensate cruelty, now abolished the moratorium, so that any items that were not instantly redeemed by their owners would be put up for sale. In a second act, the Assembly allowed landlords to immediately claim from their impoverished tenants all the back rent that had come due to them during the terrible months of the siege. And as if these measures were not brutal enough to infuriate the poorer sectors of Paris, the Assembly delivered its *coup de grâce*: during the economically grim months of the war, when few could afford the basic means of life, Parisian shopkeepers, independent artisans, and small merchants had had to depend on promissory notes (*échéances*) from their customers. The Assembly now decreed that these had to be fully paid, with interest, within four months.

Just as the forty-five-centime tax of 1848 had infuriated the peasantry, the Assembly's abrogation of the credit moratorium now infuriated the middle classes. Innumerable small entrepreneurs who had built up a crushing backlog of loans were faced with the complete loss of their livelihood. Middle-class Parisians, many of whom had formerly regarded the workers, unemployed and poor as "rabble," now joined forces with the poor, bringing the middle class back into an alliance with the workers. In fact, the Assembly made it clear that it viewed the very existence of a republic in France as merely "provisional," implying that the gains of the September 4 uprising might soon be annulled and a monarchy restored. Having done their handiwork, these malicious reactionaries, presided over by Thiers, adjourned, to meet again on March 20 in Versailles.

More than any single factor, the Assembly's behavior (which frustrated even Thiers) revived the radicals of Paris. The clubs came back to life with renewed vigor, and during February 20 and 23, a general meeting of the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements adopted a resolution to create a Revolutionary Socialist Party. The avowed aim of the new party was

the abolition of the privileges of the bourgeoisie, its elimination as a ruling



caste and the advent of the workers to political power. In a word, social equality: no more employers, no more proletariat, no more classes."<sup>12</sup>

It would difficult not to see the hand of the International in this resolution. A meeting of delegates from the local vigilance committees approved the document, and membership in a vigilance committee now became contingent on acceptance of the resolution.

At the same time, the National Guard began to form its own decidedly leftist federation. After the armistice, some 140,000 people, mainly from the well-to-do classes of Paris, had fled the hardships of the city for the provinces, appreciably reducing the number of bourgeois or "good" National Guards. On February 6, the popular battalions sent delegates to a general meeting that endorsed the most radical of the republican candidates for the Assembly. At a second meeting, on February 16, they laid the basis for a Federation of the Paris National Guard, whose existence was confirmed a week later by 2,000 delegates from the majority of the battalions. This step-by-step process of consolidation was completed on March 15, when delegates to the new Federation of the National Guard established an officially mandated Central Committee, consisting of representatives from battalions in more than half of the *arrondissements*. Significantly, at the same time many local Guard battalions were forming their own committees to maintain a vigil in all the *arrondissements* of the capital, ready to alert Paris to any attempt by the Prussians to enter the city—and any attempt to disarm the city.

The Guard Federation was now the most formidable citizen army in France, numbering perhaps 200,000 armed men—or *fédérés*, as they preferred to call themselves, following in the traditions of the Great Revolution—with more than 200 cannons at their disposal. In late February and early March, what remained of the official government in Paris had collapsed, and the Guard Federation, with its Central Committee, and its members drawn from various local committees, effectively became the real government in the capital. Indeed, the Federation and its Central Committee now constituted themselves into an independent power—a revolutionary dual power—that, as Thiers and his government properly saw, had the potential to replace the official government. As long as the Central Committee remained a dual power, civil war with the new government, now based in Versailles, was inevitable. The sole question that faced Thiers and the *Versaillais* (as the government and the National Assembly came to be called) was the specific circumstances that would bring this latent conflict into the open.

## NOTES

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3. Quoted in Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune: 1871* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 54.
4. Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 320.
5. "First Proclamation of the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements" (September 15, 1870), in *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, ed. Stewart Edwards, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 44-6.
6. *Le Combat* (September 21, 1870), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 73.
7. "Appeal to the Paris Population by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements to Hold Elections," *Le Combat* (October 5, 1870), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 47.
8. Quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 72.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
10. Poster issued by the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, January 6, 1871, in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 49.
11. A. A. Ducrot, *La Défense de Paris (1870-1871)*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1875-78), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, pp. 104-5.
12. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 113.
13. "Formation by the Vigilance Committees of a 'Revolutionary Socialist party'" (February 20 and 23, 1871), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 54.



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## CHAPTER 31 The Paris Commune of 1871

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The peace treaty between Bismarck and the National Assembly, it has been noted, permitted the Prussian army to stage a formal march into the French capital on March 1 and “occupy” it (more as a symbolic gesture than a reality) until the first payment on the indemnity was met—which the national government promptly proceeded to pay. Prior to the parade, Parisians furiously debated whether they should violently resist this military insult to the city or treat it with disdainful indifference. After much discussion in the Central Committee of the National Guard and the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, it was wisely decided not to provoke the Prussians, who, after their parade, confined their occupation of Paris to the north of the capital’s perimeter.

At the same time, the more radical sectors of the populace were mindful that Thiers and his government were only too eager to disarm Paris, indeed to disband any potentially revolutionary National Guard units that might challenge the authority of the National Assembly over the French capital. Accordingly, workers in Paris began to seize weapons wherever they were stored, especially the *chassepôts* and early machine guns, or *mitrailleuses*, that had been denied to radical Guard battalions during the siege. Above all, they began to collect the cannons that had been parked in the middle-class districts of western Paris for use against the Prussians. Since large numbers of these cannons had been purchased by patriotic popular subscription, they were now seen as, by all rights, belonging to the people. Hence the cannons in the western half of Paris were dragged by them across the city and installed on the working-class heights of Belleville and Montmartre, presumably to keep them out of the clutches of the Prussians.

Ironically, the peace treaty was to prove very serviceable to the radicals in Paris. Not only did it give them the excuse they needed to park as many cannons as they could in the eastern working-class areas, but inasmuch as the agreement between Thiers and Bismarck obliged the French national

government to significantly reduce its garrison in the capital to some 60,000 men, most of the French army regulars in and around the city were demobilized. As a result, the largest military force remaining in Paris was the National Guard—which had been allowed, under the terms of the earlier armistice, to keep all of its weapons. The army demobilization left some 200,000 well-trained line soldiers and mobiles in the city without income, and although many of them returned to their home provinces, others remained behind and fraternized with the National Guard, in many cases joining its ranks.

If the National Assembly had ever had any possibility of regaining the cannons from the potential insurgents in Paris, it had foreclosed it when it ended the moratorium on rental payments and overdue loans. Having just emerged from an agonizing siege, ordinary Parisians were now expected to make payments that they could not possibly afford. On March 15, as we have seen, the National Guard angrily responded to these provocations by forming a Federation of its local battalions and electing a guiding Central Committee. This Central Committee was determined to keep the cannons in Paris under its own control. Negotiations between the Central Committee and the National Assembly—mediated by the *arrondissement* mayors—ultimately failed, and the city's artillery remained in the hands of the people.

## THE CANNONS OF MONTMARTRE

Thiers fully understood that the cannons had to be removed and Paris disarmed if the government was to exercise control over the capital. On March 16 he arrived in Paris with his ministers, and a day later, at a government council meeting, they formulated a plan to seize the cannons in the working-class districts. Regiments of line troops were to occupy all the major squares, buildings, railroad stations, bridges, and strategic points in the center and eastern half of the capital. Generals Lecomte and Faurel were to enter the city from the north and scale the steep heights of Montmartre and Belleville, which together had 245 cannons out of the 417 guns held by the Guard. It is apparent that Thiers intended not only to confiscate the Guard's artillery but to establish military control over revolutionary Paris, stationing troops in considerable force in strategic positions and, if necessary, subduing any resistance in the working-class districts. The police were authorized to arrest and imprison some thirty members of the Central Committee and to seize every known radical that they could find in the capital.

The success of Thiers's coup would depend entirely on secrecy, speed, and surprise. At three a.m. on March 18, while most of Paris was asleep, the troops



were ordered out of their barracks, without even eating breakfast, and swiftly marched to their assigned positions. When they arrived at the artillery park at Montmartre, they found it poorly guarded and occupied it easily, taking complete possession of the guns. They then settled down to await the horses that were to come to cart them away. Owing to a lack of coordination as well as horses, however, the soldiers found themselves waiting for hours.

At dawn, the unsuspecting neighborhood around them began to stir. Incredibly, the soldiers were still sitting in the park as late as eight a.m., famished and chilled by the night mist. Many men had left their posts and weapons to get something to eat at the opening bistros. No sooner did the working-class women emerge from their houses and see the soldiers than they set off a furious alarm—Louise Michel ran through the neighborhood, calling out the National Guard, who quickly arrived in their kepis and assembled in columns to protect the artillery. The demoralized regular soldiers were no more eager to fight the Guards than the Guards were eager to fight them. When General Lecomte ordered his men to fire, they flatly refused, and troops on both sides began to fraternize. The entire operation soon collapsed. By nine in the morning, government soldiers, National Guards, and workers—female as well as male—were toasting each other and the republic in joyous celebration.

Thiers's foray into the revolutionary heart of Paris had been a complete fiasco. Allowing for minor variations, much the same story was repeated throughout the city: either horses came too late to be used, or National Guards were alerted in time to prevent the government troops from seizing the cannons. Everywhere soldiers of the line fraternized with the Guards. The Parisians' victory was not entirely bloodless, to be sure—it cost the life of General Clément Thomas, the former Guard commander who, dressed in civilian clothing, had been drawn into the streets out of curiosity. There he was recognized and pursued by a crowd who remembered his bloody role in repressing the *journée* of May 15, more than two decades earlier. Despite earnest efforts by National Guards to protect him—he was a republican now—he was killed, as was General Lecomte, who had provocatively unsheathed his sword against an angry crowd. An autopsy later revealed that dozens of bullets from army *chassepôts* accounted for their deaths, which suggests that they had been shot by troops. This evidence notwithstanding, Thiers would claim that they had been brutally murdered by the "reds" of Paris.

At three in the afternoon, Thiers and his ministers convened at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they decided that, in the light of the fiasco, the government would evacuate the city. Suddenly, looking down from a window, the minister of war saw a battalion of National Guards marching in the street below. Fearing that the Guards intended to capture them, all the ministers were thrown into a panic. Although the Guard battalion marched past the Ministry, with no inkling of the haul they could have scooped up by taking the building,

the ministers scattered in different directions. Thiers, scurrying down the back stairs to a carriage and cavalry escort, paused only to confirm the order to evacuate the capital, then made his way as quickly as possible to Versailles.

Despite furious opposition from Jules Ferry, the mayor of Paris, and by some of the *arrondissement* mayors, Thiers's decision to abandon the capital was irrevocable. Behind it lay a strategy that the chief of state had advocated as far back as 1848, when in the last days of Louis-Philippe's reign he had urged the king to retreat with all his troops outside the capital, regroup his forces, and then return to retake the city in a bloody conquest. Where Louis-Philippe had declined to follow his advice, Thiers himself was now free to carry it out himself. Once he had built up his forces at Versailles, his hand, Thiers reasoned, would be free to eliminate the revolutionary "pest" once and for all. As time was soon to reveal, he considered the Parisian working class to be little more than vermin who had to be ruthlessly driven back to their holes in the slums.

## PARIS UNDER THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Once the ministers had departed, control over Paris and its environs, for all practical purposes, lay in the hands of the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation. Barely had the government fled, however, when the Committee, apparently stunned by its own success, performed the first of the many blunders that were to mark its actions—or lack of them—during the two weeks when it was the governing body in Paris, with potentially enormous power. It did virtually nothing against the fleeing government or its troops. Even as Thiers and his cabinet were hurrying to Versailles, the Committee behaved as though it were faced with the need to defend itself. Rather than mount an attack to crush its opponents, the Committee ordered the Guard's battalion officers to build barricades to protect themselves against an attack, indeed to withdraw if the government undertook a resolute assault.

On the following Sunday night, March 19, the Central Committee convened at the Hôtel de Ville to decide on its next step. Two energetic Blanquists, Émile Eudes, a steelworker, and Paul Brunel, a student, called on the Committee to make an immediate attack upon the retreating and demoralized government troops and march on Versailles, demands that were supported by the Montmartre committee of the National Guard. At the very least, the two Blanquists demanded that the city gates be closed—as Blanqui himself had ordered during the attempted coup of October 31—to prevent the troops from escaping to Versailles. Lissagaray, whose *History of the Commune of 1871* has long been regarded by the Left as the official account of the Commune, notes that at the very time of the Committee's meeting, "Hles of soldiers were still



marching off (to Versailles) through the gates of the left bank."<sup>1</sup> Had the Central Committee mounted such an attack on Thiers's fleeing troops, it is fairly certain that the Guards could have defeated them and taken Versailles. Indeed, as Edwards observes,

The retreat of the army to Versailles was chaotic. The troops were insubordinate to their officers, and it was only the gendarmes who could keep some sort of order. So hasty was the withdrawal that several regiments were forgotten and left stranded in Paris.<sup>2</sup>

Possibly because the two Blanquists were too young to be treated with the respect that their mentor had earned by his long years of experience and imprisonment, their pleas were ignored. Lissagaray describes how their demands to immediately march on Versailles were answered: "No. We have only the mandate to secure the rights of Paris. If the provinces share our views, let them imitate our example."<sup>3</sup> The Committee, apparently suffering a disastrous failure of nerve, gave every excuse it could muster for doing almost nothing. Far from mounting an attack, it procrastinated, even allowing the demoralized Versailles troops to retreat by failing to close the city's gates.

Moreover, most of the forts, which had originally been held by regular army troops outside the city during the war, were unoccupied. It seems not to have occurred to the National Guard at least to claim Mont-Valérien, the most important stronghold in the whole Parisian defensive system, while it could still be easily taken. Indeed, for two whole days it lay virtually unoccupied; not until Monday did Thiers's forces take over this vital outpost and foreclose the possibility that the Central Committee could claim it.

What the Central Committee lacked that Sunday night and for much of its remaining existence was the presence of Louis-Auguste Blanqui, who had acted so decisively in the uprising the previous October. But Blanqui, still at large since that failure, had finally been captured by the government in the provinces on March 17, only a day before the attack upon Montmartre and Belleville. Thiers, who was only too familiar with Blanqui's resoluteness, would keep him imprisoned throughout the entire period of the Commune. Perhaps more than anyone else, he knew that no one could have better given it clear direction, at least in military affairs, than the old revolutionary.

In fact, few revolutionary institutions were more confused about their immediate goals and functions than the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation. As Lissagaray observes, the Committee "saw not—very few saw as yet—that this was a death struggle with the Assembly at Versailles."<sup>4</sup> Instead, hesitant, overly cautious, and reluctant to confront Thiers and the National Assembly, it was preoccupied with clarifying the scope of its own powers and its own legal status. Finally the members decided to call, as quickly

as possible, for the election of a Commune to replace their own Committee. Thus, in its "Appeal to the Departments," the Committee declared that its "existing powers are essentially provisional, and will be replaced by an elected Communal Council."<sup>5</sup> At a time when the Committee should have been subduing Thiers, it issued a statement limiting its own authority.

"Let the provinces therefore hasten to imitate the example of the capital by organizing themselves in a republican fashion," the "Appeal" continued. Herein, as Edwards emphasizes, lay another of the great failings of the Paris Commune of 1871: the parochial mentality of its officers and men. On the afternoon of March 18, when the Central Committee was busy issuing defensive orders to Guard battalions and ordering the battalions of the seventeenth and eighteenth *arrondissements* to take the Place de Vendôme, "the local commanders hesitated to lead their men into the centre of Paris away from the safety of their own districts," Edwards notes dryly.<sup>6</sup> And indeed it was not until eight that evening, nearly six hours after the order was given, that the battalions had moved toward the plaza in the heart of the capital. Moreover, the Central Committee's strategic vision of a revolution, in many cases, did not extend further than the immediate neighborhoods in which its members lived, let alone beyond the walls of Paris. As in June 1848 they were imbued with a notion of revolutionary spontaneity that precluded any serious attempt to give their revolutions guidance, still less direction.

The Committee's "Appeal to the Departments" also reveals the nature of the political thinking that guided the members of the Committee. After calling upon the provinces to imitate the capital, it declared: "We have only one hope, one end: the safety of the country and the final triumph of the democratic Republic, one and indivisible."<sup>7</sup> Like many other proclamations of the Central Committee and of the Commune that followed it, the "Appeal" echoes the republican appeals of the Great Revolution more than the class-oriented proclamations of the June insurgents of 1848.

But in a less tepid and more class-oriented vein, Central Committee delegates to the government's *Journal officiel* declared that

the proletarians of the capital, faced with the incompetence and treachery of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has come for them to save the situation by taking direction of public affairs ... Will the workers, who produce everything and enjoy nothing in return, who endure poverty in the midst of wealth which they have produced by the sweat of their brow, always be subjected to abuse? ... The proletariat, faced with a constant threat to its rights, a total denial of all its legitimate aspirations, along with the imminent destruction of the country and of all its hopes, has realized that it is its imperative duty and absolute right to take its destiny in its own hands by seizing political power.<sup>8</sup>



The two statements seem strangely at odds with each other. The first emphasizes civic autonomy and political rights, speaking to the citizens of Paris in the same way that the Great Revolution addressed "la Nation," without any reference to economic or class issues. The second statement speaks to a specific oppressed class, the "proletariat," referring to the bitter economic war between workers and their exploiters. Since these two classes could hardly be expected to live amicably together under the existing economy, let alone share the management of a municipality, the statement stakes out a claim for the proletariat to seize "political power."

Taken together, the two statements reveal the confusion that existed not only in the Central Committee but in the Paris Commune itself, which was the all-inclusive name given to the institutions and events in Paris in the spring of 1871. The two statements were addressed to very different strata: the first to citizens of Paris, irrespective of their class status; the second, to radical workers in the eastern parts of the capital. The working class, principally the impoverished residents in the eastern half of Paris who worked with their hands, were the backbone of the Commune. By appealing to them in statements like the second one, with its militant class-oriented phrases, the Commune acquired the image of being a strictly working-class phenomenon.

But if the working class formed the pillar that supported the Commune, its support was also more broadly based than the working class alone. Many middle-class people—shopkeepers, small-scale producers, merchants of all kinds—actively supported the emerging Commune, which clearly issued statements to satisfy their sentiments and interests as well. The republican statements were directed toward the large numbers of bourgeois patriots as well as workers who tacitly or actively supported the Commune because they opposed the treaty that Thiers had negotiated with the Germans.

Nor did such republican appeals contradict the predominant sentiment among Commune members: the Proudhonists and Jacobins who composed a sizable part of the Central Committee and later the Commune of Paris were not opposed to the private ownership of property and hoped merely to achieve its widest distribution. Given its respect for property and legality, the Committee (and later the Commune) made no attempt to appropriate the vast gold holdings in the Bank of France; leaving the Bank's treasury completely untouched, they simply negotiated a substantial bank loan. Nor did the new officials even touch the substantial funds that lay in the safes of various ministries, which the government had left behind—despite their desperate need for money, they never broke open the locks. Instead of expropriating property, they used very moderate means to bring in much-needed funds, such as the collection of the octroi (the tax on goods entering the capital's gates). Republican legality seems to have had a paralyzing effect upon these ostensible revolutionaries who, once they were in power, despite their federalist and

sometimes socialist rhetoric, were virtually hypnotized by the mystical ambience that surrounded the French state and its financial institutions.

Where the Central Committee fretted over the legality of every action it undertook, even questioning its right to meet in the Hôtel de Ville, the Versailles threw all conventional restrictions to the winds. In this respect the contrast between the behavior of Paris and Versailles is arresting. Despite bloody altercations between the National Guards and supporters of the Versailles, the Committee—unwilling to impede freedom of speech—placed few if any restrictions on the circulation of essentially pro-Versailles propaganda in the capital. For their part, by contrast, the Versailles used every measure at their disposal to prevent news from Paris from reaching the provinces, especially pamphlets and other literature that tried to rally provincial support for the capital. Thiers's control over information was a major obstacle to the Commune's vague injunctions that other French cities and towns should follow its own example. No mere republican legalities would deter him from his goal of suppressing revolutionary Paris.

## THE CREATION OF THE COMMUNE

Finally, on March 26, Parisians went to the polls to elect their Commune. For once, they could choose their delegates in proportion to their numbers rather than by district, so that in the final tally, the densely populated working-class neighborhoods gained a representation that reflected their actual size. Out of a presumed electorate of 480,000, it was reported that some 229,000 men voted—ostensibly a rather small proportion, and one that Thiers used in order to argue that over half the voting population had abstained from the elections, in sympathy for his Versailles government. In fact, the proportion of Parisian men who voted was actually much higher; the 480,000 figure was based on the voting lists for the 1870 plebiscite—after which a large number of bourgeois had fled Paris during the siege and the armistice for nonpolitical as well as political reasons.

The Commune of Paris was finally proclaimed on March 28 on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. As the radical journalist Jules Vallès described the momentous occasion in his newspaper, *Le Cri du peuple*:

The artillery thunders a salute from the quays, the grey smoke is gilded by the sun. A crowd has gathered to greet the triumphal procession; men wave their hats and women their handkerchiefs while from the barricades the cannon humbly bow their bronze muzzles lest they threaten the joyful onlookers. ... The Commune is proclaimed by a revolutionary, patriotic



celebration, a day of peace and joy, excitement and solemnity, splendor and merriment worthy of the days lived by men of '91. ... Today is the festive wedding day of the Idea and the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the festive mood of the population seemed irrepressible and continued throughout the life of the Commune. So joyous were the people, even as the threat of the Versailles loomed over them, that Villiers de l'Isle-Adam wrote:

Would you believe it? Paris is fighting and singing! Paris is about to be attacked by a ruthless and furious army and she laughs! Paris is hemmed in on all sides by trenches and fortifications, and yet there are corners within these formidable walls where people laugh!<sup>10</sup>

More insightfully, L. Barron emphasized that underlying the festivity lay an idealistic revolutionary exaltation:

In these solemn ceremonies, these festivities, these battles joyously fought, are born the great and sublime movements that cause people to break out of their habits and set their sight on a new ideal. The educated and positive-thinking, the sceptically and the spiritually inclined, all find themselves involved in spite of themselves, carried along with the sublime multitude. This is how viable revolutions begin and develop. One returns from each exalted experience as one would awake from a dream, but the memory remains of a brief moment of ecstasy, an illusion of fraternity.<sup>11</sup>

But what in fact was the Commune? The word has multiple meanings that depend upon the context in which it is used. Derived from the medieval Latin *communa*, it originally meant a communality or a corporate community, that is, a municipality. As European towns and cities had developed self-governing institutions since the medieval era, *commune* had also come to mean a city council. Finally, French revolutionary history imparted to the Commune a uniquely radical connotation: the popular city council of 1793 was generally regarded as the most radical municipal force in the Great Revolution, until it was purged by Robespierre. The Paris Commune of 1793 included not only the communality and the city council but also the supporters and institutions of the extreme Left, which implicitly included the sections and even the radical clubs into which the *sans-culottes* were mobilized.

As for 1871, the "Commune of Paris," which appeared at the bottom of decrees and called for mobilization in the spring of that year, meant, strictly speaking, the Communal Council, the assembly of delegates who had been elected to the city council. As a substitute for the ministries that existed under the Government of National Defense, the Communal Council created nine

commissions, whose operations were supervised and coordinated by an Executive Commission. Although each commission was charged with a specific governmental portfolio, the Communal Council as a whole tended to preempt most of the activities of its commissions, which often meant that many practical details were neglected except in emergencies.

Coexisting with the Communal Council was the Central Committee of the National Guard (which had welcomed the Commune and surrendered all of its powers to it with much fanfare—only to continue meeting on its own afterward), as well as the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, and the Trade Union Federation. In addition, popular clubs existed in every arrondissement of Paris, which also could be placed, together with the other organizations, under the rubric of "the Commune."

In a broad sense, then, all of these institutions constituted the Paris Commune of 1871: the Council and the Commissions that met at the Hôtel de Ville, the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation, the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, the trade unions, the International, the multitude of clubs, the various committees of the National Guard battalions, and the vigilance committees—in short, the richly articulated body of organizations that gave immense vitality to Parisian political life. To define the Paris Commune exclusively in terms of the Communal Council and its commissions is to lose sight of the wealth of public activity that engaged all the socially conscious people of the capital—activity that the privileged class profoundly feared as evidence of rampant and revolutionary anarchy.

But who were the delegates who were elected to the Commune, or more specifically the Communal Council, the body that met for some thirty-one sessions at the Hôtel de Ville? Out of a total of ninety-two seats, a good number actually went unoccupied: roughly fifteen to twenty were vacant, having been awarded to moderate republicans from the western, bourgeois half of Paris who resigned immediately after they were elected in protest of the Commune's formation. Other seats were held by delegates in absentia, such as Blanqui, who was in prison, or by Garibaldi, who was no longer in France; both had been elected for entirely honorific reasons.

How working class were the delegates? Only the roughest occupational estimates are available—hence only a general sense of the Commune's class composition can be given. About thirty-five were artisans, such as carpenters, house decorators, masons, metalworkers, bookbinders and the like. Thirty or so could be classed as intellectuals of sorts, such as journalists, and another eleven were professionals, notably doctors, lawyers, and teachers. The remainder were clerks, even businessmen, and two were soldiers. Only four or five industrial workers, from factories on the outskirts of Paris and railway shops, can be identified—indeed, the French industrial proletariat had still to find its identity and assert its interests in the largely artisanal capital. The



average age of the delegates has been placed at thirty-seven, but no single generational group predominated.

What was the political composition of the Commune? Some twenty-five of the delegates were neo-Jacobins, followed by fifteen or twenty neo-Proudhonists and protosyndicalists like Varlin, nine or ten Blanquists, a miscellany of radical republicans, and a few Internationalists who were influenced by Marx—namely Léo Frankel and Auguste Serrailier, the latter having been dispatched by the General Council as an observer. When by-elections were held on April 16 to fill the seats of those who had resigned, the Jacobin contingent was increased by nine delegates, the Proudhonists by six (including affiliates of the International), and the Blanquists by two.

Although the Blanquists were a minority, it was they who gave the Communal Council whatever fiery militancy it had. Having urgently demanded an attack on Versailles when Thiers fled, they continued to argue that the Council should undertake a military offensive against the Versailles and exercise repressive measures against Versailles propaganda inside Paris—even calling, late in the Council's life, for the formation of a Committee of Public Safety. As decisive as they were militarily—they believed in a dictatorship of Paris over the rest of France—the Blanquists had little in the way of a concrete social or economic program, apart from a militant if vague socialism.

The Jacobins, inchoate politically, were opposed to socialism, but their radical republicanism admitted the use of measures that the bourgeoisie would have regarded as socialistic, at a time when laissez-faire capitalism was becoming the ideology of the day. The most prominent Jacobin in the Council, the venerable Charles Delescluze, believed that France should be a "social democracy," by which he meant a politically (and to some extent economically) more "egalitarian" society. But the word egalitarianism may connote anything from equality of opportunity to equality of condition—and it is not at all clear that Delescluze meant anything more than equality of opportunity, reinforced by a humane concern for the plight of the poor and downtrodden. His supporters do not appear to have advanced much further in their thinking than Robespierriest ideas of political egalitarianism, the Committee of Public Safety, and the Commune of 1793. The policies they called for, in the main, would have been acceptable to the earlier Commune. They generally looked askance upon any measures that were more radical than Saint-Just's old Ventôse decrees, which had pledged to divide the property of suspects and convicted opponents of the Convention among needy patriots. Their opposition to socialism notwithstanding, however, when it came to practical details, especially in military matters and the formation of a Committee of Public Safety, the Jacobins joined with the Blanquists and the more radical Internationalists to form the majority voting bloc in the Communal Council.

The Proudhonist Internationalists and more moderate republicans formed

the Communal Council's minority, and as we have seen, they believed in the private ownership of property. Indeed, to soothe unfounded bourgeois fears that the Commune was about to expropriate the wealthy, Proudhonist periodicals assured the public that the Commune held private property in "sacred" regard and would fully respect it. A few days after the Commune was established, one newspaper, the *Société*, wrote soothingly: "Be assured, bourgeois and peasants, there is no question of robbing you of your conquests. You legitimately possess what you have gained."<sup>12</sup> Although the Proudhonists were in the minority on the Council, they had reason to make such an assurance in the name of the Commune because, as Samuel Bernstein observes:

Whatever social and economic programme the Commune had, stemmed from the [Proudhonist Internationalists]. The primary demands were Proudhonist, such as free credit, co-operation, a peoples's bank and free exchange of the products of labour. . . . History, to be sure, had pulled them into strikes and political action. But they preferred autonomy and federalism to centralism, a cardinal point with neo-Jacobins and Blanquists.<sup>13</sup>

In practice, the concrete Proudhonist demands did not add up to much; the Commune was too besieged, quarrelsome, and short-lived to effectuate much of an economic program before it was crushed.

If socialism is to be defined in any modern sense (especially as proletarian socialism), as a cooperative society involving the public ownership of the means of production—including workshops, factories, and land—then apart possibly from Léo Frankel and the other non-Proudhonist Internationalists on the Council, the Paris Commune of 1871 was not socialist. Certainly, the Commune's practices were neither Babouvist nor Marxist, let alone anarchist in Bakunin's collectivist sense of the word. If, more strictly speaking, the Commune is conceived as a government of workers or a "workers' state," the student of the Commune encounters even more ambiguities. Most strikingly, the Council did not expropriate the bourgeoisie or try to socialize the many workshops and industrial facilities of Paris. There is nothing, in fact, to show that most of its delegates ever intended to do so—as we have seen, most of the delegates on the Council were Jacobins, followed by Proudhonists, who together believed in private property.

The only official program that the Commune ever promulgated, published in the *Journal officiel* of April 20, was notable not only for its brevity but for its largely political demands.<sup>14</sup> It called for the recognition of the republic (which the National Assembly, as yet, had not formally proclaimed), and many of its affirmations were municipalist in nature, invoking the "inherent rights" of the Commune itself. It asserted the right of French communes to function autonomously based on a Proudhonist "contract of association" to "secure the



unity of France," affirming the Commune's "inherent right" to vote its own budgets and taxes, and to create its own administrative, judicial, and police apparatus. Not only were elections to be free, but voters would also have "the permanent right of control and revocation" of all magistrates. Citizens were to enjoy the right of "permanent intervention into Communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas and the free defense of their interests."<sup>13</sup>

But the program expressed no commitment whatsoever to the collective ownership of property—a lacuna that was of deep concern to the anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin in his discussion of the Commune. Nowhere did the Commune's program even make basic assertions of artisanal socialism for the "organization of work" or the "right to work," which was unusual considering that most radical French socialists of the time were still mainly associationist. To be sure, it cited the "liberty of work" and expressed the Commune's intention to "universalize power and property according to the necessities of the moment." But such a right could have been exercised by any bourgeois government as a response to the exigencies of war.<sup>14</sup>

The essentially nonsocialist nature of the Paris Commune is somewhat ironic, considering that the Commune quickly became legendary in the international socialist movement as a socialist uprising, perhaps because of the rhetoric articulated by its more radical adherents, especially the Blanquists and the non-Proudhonist Internationalists, as well as miscellaneous class-conscious workers and intellectuals. Yet to call the Commune "socialist" in any modern, proletarian sense is to stretch the meaning of the term beyond recognition until it is lost in a foggy notion of "equally" modest nonexploitative enterprises. The actual social practices of the Commune, if anything, were oriented toward artisanal socialism, but even in this respect, as we will see, its efforts toward sponsoring the creation of a cooperative society, along the lines of Louis Blanc, were half-hearted at best. (Ironically, Blanc himself, having returned to Paris from England with the fall of Louis-Napoleon, was quietly sitting as a representative in the National Assembly at Versailles.)

Although there is no important evidence that most members of the Communal Council meant to expropriate the bourgeoisie, there was much talk in the capital about the possibilities for workers' control of production, particularly in the large factories on the outskirts of Paris, and for a more equitable distribution of goods and the wealth of the country. But this talk was not formulated into a systematic program that went beyond moral cries for economic justice and denunciations of class exploitation. The most broadly felt view of the artisanal socialists in Paris was that the means of life should be distributed based on toil, not on the ownership of capital. Put colloquially: they stood for the "workers against the bosses"—a deeply moral class consciousness, to be sure, but hardly the programmatic or theoretical foundations for ending the power of capital in France.

What, then, were the concrete economic policies of the Commune? The first item on the Council's economic agenda was to counteract the specific pieces of unfeeling legislation that the National Assembly had visited upon the workers and middle classes. On March 30, only two days after it was inaugurated, the Council reinstated the moratorium on overdue rents, much to the relief of ordinary Parisians. On April 12, not without considerable wrangling, it also reinstated the moratorium on overdue commercial bills, but partly because of its qualms about offending the sensibilities of Parisian "commercial interests"—the more well-to-do entrepreneurs who were least friendly to the Commune—the Council did not officially announce this measure until April 18. The delay undoubtedly induced the financially vulnerable to wonder how real was the concern of the Commune for their own interests. Insofar as both these moratoriums had been enacted by the old bourgeois Government of National Defense in a time of national emergency, then abrogated by a vindictive National Assembly, their reinstatement, however humane it was, can hardly be regarded as revolutionary. The moratoriums were both popular, but the Council's qualms about rushing to reinstate the delay on overdue bills is a striking example of its economic conservatism, reflecting the awe in which the Proudhonists held property, credit, and banking practices. Indeed, it was not until April 25—nearly a month after its establishment—that the Council requisitioned vacant lodgings for the homeless.

Nor did it behave with conspicuous zeal in dealing with one of the issues most vexing for the working class—the National Assembly's heartless law permitting the sale of goods that had been pawned in the state pawnshop, *Mont de Piété*. For ordinary Parisians, cancellation of the Assembly's legislation was imperative—indeed, many of the poorest artisans had pawned their tools and even their clothing during the most difficult moments of the siege. Not that the pawnshop had been much of a boon to working people. Although *Mont de Piété* was the city's largest recipient of workers' pawned goods, it had been particularly biased, as has been noted, against the poorest workers, charging the highest interest rates for loans on the least expensive items, and the lowest rates for those on the most expensive items. Nonetheless, allowing the pawned goods to be sold had been a cruel blow on the part of the Assembly, divesting workers of the much-needed personal possessions and tools.

Once the Commune was in power, the cancellation of the Assembly's legislation was held up by a lively debate in the Council over the issue of socializing the pawnshop. The Council's delegates argued intensely among themselves about whether the pawnshop should be nationalized (as the Blanquists thought), modified (the Jacobins), abolished (the revolutionary socialists), turned into a workers' bank (the Proudhonists), or simply left as it was (a variety of republicans). Not until May 7, more than five weeks after the Commune had been brought into existence, was the decree canceling the



Assembly's law proclaimed, and in the end, the Council made no change in the pawnshop's directorship; it simply renewed the old moratorium, allowing for the restitution of work tools and household items of up to twenty francs in value.

To be sure, many workers benefited from the Council's decrees. Thus on April 27, employers were forbidden to deduct fines from workers' wages, and the next day, April 28, the exacting nightwork hours imposed on bakers were abolished. But even this measure was delayed because of the protests of bakery owners. Moreover, the Council also abolished the *livret de travail*, the personal record of employment that every worker had been obliged to carry and show to any new employer.

From a leftist perspective, the most celebrated of the Council's decrees was the one issued on April 16 that concerned the empty factories and workshops whose owners had fled Paris during the siege. These vacated premises, according to the new law, could be transformed into self-managed cooperatives. To radicals of the time the measure on cooperatives seemed a remarkable instance of associationism, but the fact remains that the besieged regime had to mobilize production in any way it could, and any bourgeois regime under similar circumstances of impending military threat could have created cooperatives to do so. In all, about ten factories were taken over and run as cooperatives by the trade unions. The new industrial cooperatives, it should be emphasized, were not created as a result of expropriations; in fact, although the former owners were scathingly denounced as cowards for fleeing Paris, they were promised financial restitution for their property when they returned. By contrast, the large Cail factory, which had been continually troubled by strikes and class antagonisms, was left completely untouched.

To be sure, the Commune did try to promote voluntary producers' associations, in which privately owned workshops cooperated with each other in sharing resources and fixing prices. About forty-three such craft cooperatives were established, but few of them were able to get under way before their workers were obliged to mount barricades against the Versailles. Moreover, they faced problems typical of later attempts at what came to be called workers' control: the market threw them into competition with completely independent enterprises. Generally, in fact, such producers' cooperatives have a disconcerting tendency to drift toward "collective capitalism." Not only do they tend to become part of the capitalist system, but their ability to survive as cooperatives is impaired when conventional independent workshops can charge less for their products than the cooperatives, thereby driving them out of business or forcing them to compete with each other.

Unfortunately, Proudhon had not explained in his writings how this problem of marketplace competition could be overcome, but capitalist economic imperatives reigned no less in "red" Paris than in "white" Versailles. Contrary to all ideas of artisanal socialism, the Commune tended to buy not

from the cooperatives, which badly needed paying customers, but from the cheapest vendors—the conventional independent firms. Not until May 12, in response to a surge of complaints, did the Commune change its policy to favor cooperatives and instruct its various agencies to buy primarily from them. That it had to be pressured into adhering to a basic tenet of artisanal socialism is revealing of the Commune's fiscal conservatism and limited economic outlook.

The Commune's dealings with the Bank of France were no bolder than those of the Central Committee, more closely resembling comic opera than a challenge to a major financial institution. On March 29, the day after the Commune's inauguration, the Commune sent the seventy-six-year-old Charles Beslay, an engineer, to the Bank as its delegate. Contrary to what one might have expected from a revolutionary socialist body, the Council did not authorize Beslay to assert the Commune's control over this immensely important institution, still less to hold it hostage against the entire bourgeoisie of France. Rather, his task was to exercise a vague surveillance over the Bank's activities. Beslay was not predisposed to be confrontational, least of all toward so austere and powerful an enterprise as a national bank. The old man had been a friend of Proudhon, indeed a fervent disciple, an association that appears to have disarmed what fortitude he might have possessed in dealing with a large bank. Ironically, where Proudhon had once demanded the "organization of credit" on behalf of artisans, his friend Beslay now stood in awe of the most important credit institution in France—which might have been expropriated and even transformed into a Proudhonist People's Bank.

Instead, the meeting between Beslay and the Marquis de Floeuc, the Bank's acting governor, was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The crafty marquis, chatting amiably, managed to establish a rapport with the old man that was to last the entire life of the Commune. Personally, Beslay thanked the marquis for his public-spiritedness in heading an ambulance service during the siege, and the two warmly agreed that the financial integrity of France, not to speak of her business interests, depended upon retaining the integrity of her financial institution—especially after the day the National Guards rudely entered the bank to search it for arms. The vigilant Beslay, wrapped in the authority of his red sash, dissuaded the Guards from intervening in the Bank's business and even took up residence there in order to prevent further intrusions. Meanwhile, for the remainder of the spring, the marquis, while honoring the financial requests of the Commune, systematically smuggled sizable amounts of gold out to the Versailles—under the very nose of Beslay. The Council, for its part, seemed satisfied with the Bank as long as it was loaning it the relatively modest sums it requested.

Marx was later to claim that the Commune would have needed more time than it had to unfold its internal logic—presumably a socialistic logic. But would the Commune have evolved toward socialism, even if time had been on



its side? To radical artisans, the most humane alternatives to the existing economy were still associations—cooperatives—whether owned and managed by a sizable number of factory workers or by cooperatives of craftspeople in small privately owned workshops. At most, the Commune might have evolved toward fostering cooperatives more aggressively. But as we have seen, any notion of the ownership and control of the means of production even by the municipality as a whole, still less the nationalization of property, was far from the minds of the majority of delegates. The Commune either ignored or eschewed the need to create a society in which private ownership, the market, and even profit would be replaced by the social ownership of the means of production and the distribution of goods according to needs—in short, a communistic society.

Despite the abundance of red flags on the Commune barricades and the wealth of legends that have grown up around the Commune itself, it was not the climax or even necessarily the most class-conscious of the nineteenth-century revolutions. The June insurrection of 1848—which, by comparison with the Commune, the revolutionary tradition has all but forgotten—was far more class-conscious and far more committed to making basic changes in the "organization of work"; it was even more audacious in its demands to replace capitalist relations of production with cooperative ones. In his closely researched comparative study of the June insurrection of 1848 and the Commune of 1871, Roger V. Gould has shown that the class nature of the Commune has been overemphasized at the expense of its civic features—to which I would add, its patriotic features. Where the June 1848 uprising widely demanded the emancipation of workers, the Communal Council (and the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation) addressed themselves overwhelmingly to the citizenry as a whole. The Commune's "demands for municipal liberties and the safeguarding of the Republic," Gould observes, were far different from the class-oriented statements and proclamations common in 1848:

The Central Committee of the National Guard Federation, in its own carefully drafted announcement of elections to the Commune, made it abundantly clear that the constituency on whose behalf it saw itself as acting—the constituency, in other words, of the revolution itself—was the entire city of Paris, irrespective of class position.<sup>17</sup>

What the insurgency of June 1848 and the Commune have in common is that they were both expressions of artisanal socialism, one coming early, during its period of hegemony, and the other at its waning phase. In marked contrast to the insurgents of June, the Commune's approach, both in its declarations and in its practices, was notable for its moderation. In this respect—contrary to

the prominent place it has been given in the history of socialism—the Commune marked a retreat from the high point of the artisanal socialist agitation that had been reached in 1848.

## THE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE COMMUNE

On the day following its inauguration, the Commune created commissions corresponding to the regular ministries of the national government. The most important of these, during the early weeks, were the Executive Commission and the Military Commission. The Executive Commission was composed of four civilians and three military officers. The civilians were Gustave Lefrançais, a Proudhonist schoolteacher; Gustave Tridon, a fervent Blanquist and journalist-historian; Édouard Vaillant, a Blanquist engineering student; and the mischievous Félix Pyat, whose ultraradical rhetoric was equaled only by his cunning in extricating himself from dangerous situations. The three military members were Jules Bergeret, a bookshop worker whose main military qualification was that he had been elected to a leading position in the National Guard; Émile Duval, a committed Blanquist steelworker who had urged an immediate attack on Versailles after March 18; and Émile Eudes, the Blanquist student who had also urged an attack on Versailles.

The Military Commission, for its part, contained all three of the Executive Commission officers—Bergeret, Duval, and Eudes—as well as Gustave Flourens, whose flamboyant role in the October 31 attack on the Hôtel de Ville had gained him a reputation for courage and militancy. Raoul Rigault and Théophile Ferré, both young Blanquists, took charge of Security—that is, of the Parisian police.

Unlike the Provisional Government in 1848, the Commune also created a Labor and Exchange Commission, as evidence of its concern for the interests of the Parisian working class. Sitting on this commission and the Industry Commission were three of the Commune's most prominent internationalists and socialists: the jeweler Léo Frankel (who was in close touch with Marx), the bronze worker Albert Thiersz, and the publicist Benoît Malon. The syndicalist and internationalist Eugène Varlin sat on the Finance Commission, together with the internationalist Victor Clément and the bumbling Proudhonist Charles Beslay. Mention should also be made of one of the Commune's most impressive figures, the aging and ailing Jacobin journalist Charles Delescluze, who tried to let younger, more energetic individuals take leading roles in the Commune but was continually drawn into it by the demanding problems it faced.

As a whole, the Communal Council and its commissions were too disparate



ideologically and included too many prickly intellectuals and even bohemians to function effectively. The Proudhonists were embattled with the socialists, while the Jacobins dueled with almost everyone, including each other. Moreover, many of the Commune's members were answerable to multiple constituencies. Too often, when the Commune attempted to cope with the city's needs in an orderly fashion, its efforts were impeded by the presence of many groups and institutions claiming jurisdiction over different aspects of the capital's life. In reality, however, the inauguration of the Communal Council on March 28 had been of no great significance to the various committees, clubs, and other local institutions that embodied the Commune in the everyday life of the neighborhoods. For one, the local mayors of the *arrondissements* were a constant nuisance to the Council, challenging its legality, claiming that they alone were the sole legal governing authority in Paris—a claim that they did not give up until local National Guard committees, acting on their own initiative, simply expelled the mayors from the *mairies*. For its part, the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation—although it welcomed the Council and with much fanfare surrendered all its legal powers to it—still continued to exist, almost as a parallel power to the Hôtel de Ville, its preoccupation with legal niceties notwithstanding. Another constant presence was the Delegation of the Twenty Arrondissements, which issued local challenges to many of the Communal Council's policies at the neighborhood level.

The plethora of committees and clubs that flourished in the neighborhoods constituted still another level of local power. Attendance must have varied enormously from one meeting to another, but some involved thousands of people. The political outlook of the clubs seems to have ranged across the whole political spectrum and often constituted a strange mix of centralistic Jacobin and extreme libertarian views akin to those of Varlet in 1783. The Club des Proletaires, meeting in the Church of Saint-Ambroise, for example, emulating the radical sections of the Great Revolution, demanded that the Commune desist from issuing decrees and seek popular sanction for its proposals, a view that was echoed by the Club Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs.

But sectional democracy or not, the clubs seem to have been very conscious of themselves as an important political phenomenon. The Club Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs exhibited a great deal of initiative in promoting a federation of the clubs: it published a daily *Bulletin communal* to provide accounts of debates in the different clubs and present the various proposals that they had accepted. In fact a short-lived Federation of Clubs was established, as Edwards tells us, whose committee held daily meetings in the public assistance building and whose individual component clubs began "to circulate motions among themselves."<sup>18</sup> When the time came for the Commune to resist the troops of the National Assembly in the streets of Paris, the clubs played a vital role in mobilizing popular local support for the struggle.

All of these various committees, as well as the Council and its commissions, were plagued by disagreements—political, social, and unfortunately, personal—that frequently threw them against one another and wracked them internally as well. The Parisian municipality was direly in need of a communal constitution that clearly delineated the jurisdictions of its many committees and that established ways to coordinate its administration. No such constitution existed. Where the Assembly was centralistic and statist, the Commune was decentralistic and confederal, not only in administering the city but in its militia, or *fédérés*, as the National Guard was appropriately called. For the first time since 1793, Varlet's day, Paris had created a loosely libertarian alternative to central government in France. But in the face of a military emergency it would have been difficult enough to maintain this libertarian structure, and even the most libertarian institutions require a degree of centralization to defeat a well-organized military force. Unfortunately, the *fédérés* were often as local in their orientation as the rest of the clubs and *arrondissement* organizations. Their decisions were usually based on the will of individual neighborhood committees, which often acted entirely on their own.

To add to these problems, the Communal Council's authority was subverted when the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation adamantly refused to accept the fact that responsibility for the *fédérés*—the military arm of the Commune of Paris—no longer belonged to itself but was now the province of the Military Commission. The Central Committee regarded the Commune as a purely political and administrative body—and an inadequate one at that—rather than a military one and thus tried to recover the control over the Guard that it had surrendered with the installation of the Communal Council.

Finally, even among the *fédérés*, the National Guard battalions often disregarded orders they received, whether they came from the Commune's Military Commission or from the Central Committee itself. Some artillery battalions acted entirely on their own, obeying no one but their own independent *arrondissement* committees. Others went so far as to arrest their own commanders if they suspected them of any dereliction of duty. Indeed, so chaotic was their behavior that they often made the Commune's military force essentially dysfunctional. Even in a time of dire emergency, when the Commune's military commanders tried to mobilize the city against the *Versaillais*, battalions of *fédérés* were often unresponsive to their commands. Ironically, the Central Committee's attempt to assert itself against the Commune diverted its attention and energy from the task of bringing military discipline to the ranks, and turning them into the effective fighting force that the city needed so desperately.

Not only was the National Guard undisciplined and chaotic, but as Lissagaray emphasizes, it was not trained to fight as a field army, despite its valiant showing during the sortie of January 19. The *fédérés* were at their best as



a defensive force, not in attacks upon regular troops. A well-trained, experienced, and disciplined force might have had a good chance of defeating Thiers's troops—especially in the early days of the Commune—and the Guards were certainly more motivated than their opponents, but they had none of the qualities that would have made them effective against a well-organized army. Despite small successes and acts of extraordinary heroism, the *fédérés* never won any major victories against the well-disciplined *Versaillais*.

## THE COMMUNE AT WAR

The Commune's inability to coordinate the Guards and train them to become an offensive fighting force was particularly troubling in light of the fact that the National Assembly and the head of state in Versailles had absolutely no intention of allowing the Commune to continue to exist for any longer than it was obliged to. As the history of revolutionary movements over the centuries has repeatedly revealed, counterrevolution takes no quarter in any class war, and as such, if the Commune could hope to survive at all, it was obliged to throw the *fédérés* against the *Versaillais* quickly, before Thiers could mobilize his regular army.

This the Commune did not do. Nothing reveals the Commune's naïveté better than its public response to a limited foray that the *Versaillais* made on April 2, to occupy a temporary barracks at Courbevoie, some six miles to the northwest of Paris. When the National Guards engaged Thiers's forces that day, they acquitted themselves poorly—in fact, they fled in a pell-mell retreat. Thiers could have ordered his troops to pursue the fleeing *fédérés* into Paris, but as yet he did not feel his forces were strong enough: two weeks after he had vacated Paris, he still had a total of only 35,000 disorganized troops and 3,000 gendarmes at his disposal.

But he did give evidence of his deadly intentions by executing five captured Communards, which caused the Commune to explode in injured outrage. In a genuinely shocked denunciation, the Executive Commission declared, "Royalist conspirators have ATTACKED. In spite of our moderate attitude, they have ATTACKED."<sup>19</sup> This reaction was surely highly symptomatic of a larger problem: that the Commune expressed shock at being attacked in the midst of a conflict that was, if not a clear-cut class war, then clearly a social war, was self-deceptive in the extreme. That it could have been so shocked revealed an absence of psychological fortitude and political sophistication, not to speak of an unpreparedness to determinedly resist its resolute and committed enemy.

The Commune had not yet accepted the reality that it was facing a civil war, led by a ruthless enemy that was remorselessly planning its extermination. Not

until it was too late did it come to terms with this fact—or realize the necessity for confronting its enemy while it still had a chance to prevail. The failure of the Central Committee and then the Communal Council to perceive the intentions of the Versailles in the weeks after March 18; their continued quibbling over republican legality; the uncertainty that surrounded almost every action they took outside a strictly "constitutional" framework that had yet to be defined; their trepidation in dealing with the Bank of France; their respect for the money that lay untouched in various ministries; and their qualms over expropriating property (which even many bourgeois states would have done in wartime)—all guaranteed the doom of the Paris Commune of 1871.

The failings of the National Guards—as well as their courage—were demonstrated very clearly on April 3-4, just after the Versailles incursion on Courbevoie. In blind outrage against the attack, instinctively understanding that it was necessary to mount a counterattack, the Commune undertook a "grand sortie" against Thiers's troops. Apart from his incursion of the day before, Thiers had helped this endeavor along by making belligerently provocative statements and sending shells into the capital. The prospect of a full-scale civil war, which had still seemed somewhat of an abstraction, now became searingly real.

At a meeting the night before the sortie, the Communal Council gave command of the *fédérés* to Gustave-Paul Cluseret, a professional officer who, oddly enough, had begun his military career as a reactionary, capturing barricades in June 1848, but later developed more liberal sympathies. He served as a Union officer in the American Civil War, then shifted his allegiance to the International. His detractors often called him "the Yankee" because, like many American officers, his uniform was slovenly and his demeanor easygoing—and he sported a cheroot, in the fashion of General U.S. Grant. Despite his democratic "Yankee" mannerisms, however, Cluseret was a stern disciplinarian who vowed to shape the National Guard into a highly disciplined military force. But he regarded the "grand sortie" that was planned for the next day as a reckless and doomed endeavor, led by officers who were wholly unqualified to mount it. In any case, having been appointed the Commune's war delegate only at the last minute, there was little he could do to improve its prospects. As Edwards notes, he "wisely avoided taking responsibility, leaving the other generals to see through what they had so rashly begun."<sup>20</sup>

And rash it was. The most ardent proponents of the sortie were the members of the Military Commission: Duval, Eudes, and the former bookseller Bergeret. According to the plan of attack, each of these inexperienced officers was to head a column, lead it out of one of the western gates, march to Versailles, then converge with the other two columns to make a common assault. As Lissagaray bitterly observes, this simple plan would have been "easy of execution" had there been "experienced officers and solid heads of column."



But most of the battalions had been without chiefs since the 18th March, the National Guards without *cadres*, and the generals who assumed the responsibility of leading 40,000 men had never conducted a single battalion into the field. They neglected even the most elementary precautions, knew not how to collect artillery, ammunition-waggons, or ambulances, forgot to make an order of the day, and left the men for several hours without food in a penetrating fog. Every Federal chose the chief he liked best. Many had no cartridges, and believed the sortie to be a simple demonstration.<sup>21</sup>

The columns departed from Paris in a festive mood, even accompanied by women and children, naively assuming that when they encountered the *Versaillais* soldiers, the rank-and-file, rather than fight them, would instantly fraternize with their National Guard brothers, as they had done on March 18. As a result, the *fédérés* were poorly equipped and thoroughly unprepared for any serious fighting.

Not surprisingly, everything went wrong. When the northernmost column—the 15,000 *fédérés* under Bergeret's command—marched northwest toward the village of Rueil (with only eight cannons!), they were obliged to pass by Mont-Valérien, the most pivotal fort on the Parisian military perimeter—the one that the Central Committee had neglected to take when it lay virtually unoccupied immediately after March 18. A rumor was circulating among the *fédérés* that the fort was now back in the Commune's hands, but this rumor was entirely false. As Bergeret's column passed the fort, *Versaillais* artillery fire erupted and rained on the Guards, producing complete panic. Bergeret's *fédérés*, wholly astonished, scattered into the fields shouting "Treachery!" and the entire right flank fled in haste, heading back to Paris as quickly as their feet could carry them. Bergeret continued on with a few troops, coming within four miles of Versailles, after which he finally had to withdraw. Flourens, who was attached to this column, reached Rueil with a handful of men, but there he was killed, sword in hand, by a Versailles cavalry officer.

On the extreme left flank of the march, the column under Duval did no better. Lacking artillery and sufficient cartridges, the *fédérés* retreated, abandoning Duval to the *Versaillais*, who executed him. As for the center, the 10,000 Guards under Eudes managed to push due west to Meudon, but lacking sufficient artillery and ammunition to take the well-fortified *Versaillais* garrison, they retreated back to a strong point near Paris. Fortunately, guns were rushed from the capital in time to prevent the Versailles troops from taking the offensive.

The sortie was a decisive turning point in the military fortunes of Paris and Versailles. The Paris Commune was never again to undertake a major offensive against Thiers, and the National Guard, despite limited successes and individual acts of extraordinary heroism, won no major victories over its

enemies. The Versailles, in turn, emboldened by their victory, moved steadily closer to Paris, taking crucial forts such as Issy on May 9 and Vanves on May 13. Within a matter of days, Thiers's forces—reinforced by the thousands of French war prisoners that Bismarck had released precisely for this purpose—were only a few hundred yards from the city's walls.

On April 6, in response to the executions of the captured Communards, the Commune passed a Law on Hostages, which permitted it to arrest and try potential "hostages of the people of Paris." Indeed, a few individuals, including the archbishop of Paris, were taken into custody, and in mid-April the Commune offered all of these hostages to Thiers in exchange for the release of Blanqui. But Thiers calmly refused, observing that to give the old revolutionary to the Commune would be equivalent to providing it with an army corps.

On May 1, due to internal disputes, the Commune arrested Cluseret and replaced him as war delegate with Louis Rossel, an able officer who had turned against the National Assembly because of its capitulation to the Prussians. Rossel tried to transform the National Guard into a disciplined force but encountered the usual obstructions over autonomy. A less flamboyant and inspiring commander than his predecessor, he quickly lost the confidence of the *fédérés* as well as his credibility with the Commune. Only nine days after he was appointed, he resigned, in part because of the fall of Issy—the linchpin of the city's defense—and fled into the warrens of Paris before he had to answer for real or imagined malfeasances against the Commune. Indeed, in the three weeks left to the Communard leaders, the quarrels among them intensified. On May 1, in the wake of the fall of Issy, the Jacobin-Blanquist majority split with the Proudhonists and some of the Internationalists over whether to tighten central control by establishing a Committee of Public Safety.

In the face of the military emergency, there could be few disputes that at least some degree of centralized control was vital, but a rancorous conflict arose over the committee's name. The Jacobins and Blanquists favored calling it the Committee of Public Safety, invoking the tradition of which they saw themselves the continuation; but the Proudhonists and many Internationalists pointed out that it was the Committee of Public Safety that, in 1793, had destroyed the Paris Commune of that era. So bitter was the acrimony that Jules Miot, a Jacobin, demanded that the minority who opposed the name be tried as "Girondins." Although Miot's demand was happily not fulfilled, the majority in the Commune—by six votes—finally voted in favor of the ill-starred name.

Although its name raised alarms about a new terror, the new Committee of Public Safety inflicted no mass executions on the Commune's opponents. In fact, it did little more than close down critical or hostile periodicals, enforce conscription (which the local battalions of the *fédérés* carried out with considerable zest), and issue identity cards as a safeguard against the many agents in Paris who were working for Versailles. Some of its actions were merely



symbolic, such as the pulling down of Napoleon I's Vendôme column, a symbol of Bonapartist imperialism and militarism that had been forged from cannons captured by the emperor after the battle of Austerlitz. Influenced by Delescluze, however, the committee did manage to bring the majority and minority together in the waning days of the Commune, although they were by no means reconciled ideologically or even freed of mutual distrust. The Central Committee of the National Guard, now essentially a corpse, came to terms with the Commune on issues of their respective authority. But this agreement no longer had any meaning: the Versailles, reinforced by newly released prisoners of war, were about to break into the streets of Paris.

On May 21 the fully assembled Commune was meeting at the Hôtel de Ville, preoccupied with a malicious attempt by Jules Miot to put Cluseret on trial for the loss of Issy. Suddenly, at seven o'clock in the evening, a member of the Committee of Public Safety broke in with the cry: "Stop! Stop! I have a communication of the utmost importance, for which I demand a secret session."<sup>21</sup> The Versailles, he informed the Commune, had found an entry into Paris and were pouring into the city in force.

It might have been expected that at this point the Commune would finally rally itself to take immediate and decisive military action. In reality, stunned, it managed to acquit Cluseret of the charges against him; whereupon its members quickly dispersed, each to his own *arrondissement*. "Thus the council of the Commune disappeared from history and the Hôtel de Ville at the moment of supreme danger, when the Versailles penetrated Paris." As Lissagaray emphasizes in disgust,

there was no one to demand a permanent committee; no one to call on his colleague to wait here for news. ... There was no one to insist at this critical moment of uncertainty, when it might be necessary to improvise a plan of defence at a moment's notice or take a great resolution in case of disaster.<sup>22</sup>

It was the ultimate ineptitude of a conflicted, often confused, and tragic group of men lacking any clear political or organizational direction.

## THE BLOODY WEEK OF MAY 22-28

By mid-May, Thiers's troops had moved so close to the southwestern wall of Paris that their conversation could be overheard by the *fédérés* on the other side, only a few yards away. Despite these advances, however, they still could not breach the wall: their previous attempts to enter the city had been repelled often enough to render them extremely prudent about launching a direct

frontal attack. Instead, they continued their heavy artillery bombardment of the city. Unknown to them, however, they might well have made a successful foray into the city because the *fédérés* had carelessly failed to guard key parts of the wall that were highly vulnerable to attack.

On Sunday, May 21, one Ducatel was taking an afternoon stroll near the Porte de Point du Jour, in the southwestern part of the city. An engineer for the Department of Public Works, Ducatel had no sympathies for the Commune. In the course of his walk, he happened to notice that no *fédérés* were defending an immensely strategic area—indeed, that a gate was unguarded and available for the taking. At three o'clock he climbed to the top of the wall, waved a white handkerchief to the Versailles troops on the other side, and shouted, "Come!"

The Versaillais hesitated; they had been deceived twice before in similar situations, entering the city only to encounter fire from the *fédérés*. A naval officer prudently made his way over to Ducatel—and was astonished to find that a whole section of the wall and its ramparts were indeed completely deserted. Returning to his troops, the naval officer telegraphed the news to General Douay, the commanding divisional officer, who took careful precautions to confirm that the call was not a ruse. Ending the artillery bombardment of the area, he ordered his troops to advance carefully into the city in small groups. Before the day was out, some 60,000 Versaillais had entered Paris, and a full-scale assault upon the capital was under way.

That night Delescluze, head of the Committee of Public Safety and the *fédérés'* nominal commander, exhibited the Commune's fatal proclivity for a strictly localized defense by plastering Paris with posters calling to the people and the Guards to take to the streets in decentralized barricade fighting. "Enough of militarism, no more staff-officers," the poster declaimed, evoking the myth of popular spontaneity in military engagements.

Make way for the people, the bare-armed fighters! The hour of revolutionary war has struck. The people know nothing of elaborate manoeuvres, but when they have a rifle in their hands and cobble-stones under their feet they have no fear for the strategists of the monarchist school.<sup>14</sup>

The Parisian working class responded to the call, as they had before, by building barricades. Starting that night and continuing for several days, the Communards built a total of 600, in all parts of the city but especially in the eastern half. As in June 1848, everyone helped—women and children as well as men, piling not only pavés but buses, cabs, furnishings, mattresses, and even soil from the streets. In the working-class districts in particular, they formed an individually strong but disorganized network, entirely defensive in nature.

Unfortunately, the *fédérés* had much to fear from "the strategists of the monarchical school." As Cluseret and Rossel understood but Delescluze did



not, strategy and meticulous planning count for a great deal in war, and these features were conspicuously lacking among the Communards. "When the Minister of War [Delescluze] thus stigmatises all discipline," Lissagaray observes trenchantly, "who will henceforth obey?"

When he repudiates all method, who will listen to reason? Thus we shall see hundreds of men refusing to quit the pavement of their street, paying no heed to the neighbouring quarter in agonies, remaining motionless up to the last hour waiting for the army to come and overwhelm them.<sup>23</sup>

The Versailles divided themselves into two major columns, one for each bank of the Seine. In the western half, they had relatively little difficulty moving down Haussmann's boulevards and overcoming the *fédérés'* resistance. Much of the resistance they encountered was heroic: Paul Brunel, in particular, comported himself with extraordinary bravery. No less striking was the brilliant defense put up by General Jaroslav Dombrowski, a Polish nationalist of aristocratic lineage, who had completely identified with the Commune and held back the Versailles for nearly two months at Neuilly with remarkable courage.

But these heroic cases do not alter the fact that many working-class *fédérés* defended the bourgeois portions of the city with less zeal than they would have defended their own quarters. Most of the barricades in western and central Paris gave way fairly rapidly to the superior firepower and tactics of the Versailles. In addition, Haussmann's broad avenues enabled Thiers's men to execute pincer movements, unexpectedly taking barricade after barricade from the rear. In fact, the days when a frontal attack upon a barricade was the rule had come to an end; henceforth the barricade would be merely a symbolic structure rather than a military one.

Thiers knew, however, that the most ferocious battles still lay ahead, in the eastern half of the city. Those battles would have been even more ferocious if the Communards had been able to use the eighty-five cannons and two dozen machine guns that they had collected on the heights of Montmartre. But since Thiers's abortive attempt to retrieve them in mid-March, the guns had been neglected and left to corrode—indeed, they were all but useless just when they were most needed. For the few that were serviceable, there was hardly enough ammunition. The same was true of the cannons in the artillery park at the École Militaire. The disorder in the National Guard, to which all the generals appointed by the Commune had consistently objected week after week, now left them with relatively few usable cannons—the weapons par excellence that Thiers was using to demolish the capital's defenses.

At nine o'clock on the morning of May 22, the Commune—or rather, twenty of its members—assembled again at the Hôtel de Ville. Apart from rhetoric and Pyat's histrionics—he pledged, with tears in his eyes, to die on the barricades

(but disappeared before the fighting came too near and was next seen in London, after the conflict)—the Communal Council had little to offer its beleaguered *fédérés*.

On May 23, fires broke out in many important government buildings in the center of the city, including the Tuileries, the Finance Ministry, and the Hôtel de Ville, among many others. Various causes by the artillery of the *Versaillais* or by *fédérés*, the burnings cleared the way for guns to arrest the flanking movements of both sides. Later, Thiers was only too eager to claim that the fires had been the work of *pétroleuses*, or "women incendiaries," an accusation that, like so many others generated by the *Versaillais*, has been shown to be entirely spurious. To be sure, few Communards would have wept to see the symbols of French royalism, such as the Tuileries and the Louvre, go up in flames; but neither the Commune nor the workers tried to systematically burn down Paris. In all likelihood, the bombardment of the city by the *Versaillais* destroyed more structures than the Communards did.

But what is indubitably true is that the bloody repression now conducted by the *Versaillais*—the purge that Thiers had urged upon Louis-Philippe in 1848—led to the most wanton slaughter of men, women, and even children in the history of nineteenth-century counterrevolutions. Every time the *Versaillais* took a barricade, they would line up its defenders against a wall and shoot them, even those suspected merely of helping the actual fighters. Anyone found with a weapon, or wearing a portion of a National Guard uniform—such as a kepi, jacket, or cartridge belt—indeed, anyone with darkened hands that resembled powder burns—was executed at once, as were outright captives who had been cajoled into surrendering with promises of clemency. One working-class child begged an officer to temporarily release him so that he could give his watch to his mother: when the officer consented, he left, then was shot on his return. The savagery perpetrated by the Versailles troops as they advanced through the boulevards and streets of the capital beggars all description.

The executions increased the fury of the *fédérés* and made their resistance so desperate that they sometimes retaliated in kind. Not surprisingly, the six notable hostages taken by the Commune, including the archbishop of Paris, were executed in reprisal. A furious crowd, incensed by the wanton butchery by the *Versaillais* of the Communards, massacred fifty-one prisoners—mainly police and priests—despite vigorous efforts by Varlin to save them.

But the advance of Thiers's troops was relentless. Like the June insurgents of 1848, the Communards at nearly every barricade fought desperately in their own neighborhoods, sparing little or no effort to assist nearby insurgents in greater need of aid. "The troops of Versailles could only be seriously checked," Edwards observes, "if there had been a coordinated line of barricades across Paris, covering each other and preventing any given position from being outflanked and taken from behind."<sup>26</sup> No such line was formed.



The imprisoned Blanqui had long urged the Parisian working class to overcome its neighborhood parochialism at such moments and recognize the importance of developing a coordinated strategy—"above all, not to become shut up, each in his quartier, as all uprisings have never failed to do, to their great loss."<sup>27</sup> But in the seventeenth *arrondissement*, when Malon called on adjacent Montmartre for help, the *fédérés* there refused to leave their home district. Despite the Communards' ferocious resistance, their neighborhood locus allowed the *Versaillais* to vanquish them barricade by barricade, with little fear of having to face reinforcements from other districts before each barricade fell.

Belleville was the last neighborhood to hold out against the *Versaillais*, but by Saturday, May 27, the entire district was invested by Thiers's troops. At the end of the day the *Versaillais* broke into the Père Lachaise cemetery, where the Communards were making their last stand. Despite fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the Communards failed to halt the advancing troops. On Sunday, they were finally compelled to surrender—and the last important engagement of the Commune was over. The *Versaillais*, almost as a matter of course, lined the prisoners up against a cemetery wall—the *mur des fédérés*, as it came to be called—and shot them. Thousands of corpses, including those of men and women who had had to surrender because they lacked ammunition, littered the gravesites. Dramatically, the very last barricade fell on Sunday in Belleville, on the Rue Ramponeau, where one man held out alone, as long as he could, coolly defending his position against hopeless odds. After a quarter of an hour, he fired a parting shot in the direction of the attacking *Versaillais*, then calmly stepped down from the barricade and disappeared into the streets.

Charles Delescluze went to his death with all the nobility that had marked his life and character. On Thursday, May 25, dressed in an unassuming black hat, coat, and trousers, with a red scarf around his waist, the venerable Jacobin leader walked with great dignity toward a barricade at what is now the Place de la République and mounted it in full sight of the *Versaillais* guns. He was shot down. Two Communards who tried to rescue his body were also killed. Eugène Varlin, on the last day of the fighting, led a column of fifty men under a huge red flag to a barricade at the intersection of the Rue de la Fontaine and the Rue du Faubourg du Temple. After Thiers's troops took the barricade, this remarkable man wandered through the streets, dazed by the fury of the fighting. When he was recognized and taken, his captors beat him with their rifle butts, and an enraged crowd of bourgeois surrounded him and mercilessly pelted him with stones. Finally, with his face smashed and one eye out of its socket, he was placed before a firing squad. Despite his battered condition, Varlin managed to raise his head high and defiantly shout, "Long live the Commune!" It took two volleys to finish him off. Well-dressed bourgeois ladies

prodded his body as it lay in the street, until it was finally carted off with the rest of the dead.

Women had played a crucial role in the Paris Commune. Not only did they aid in building the barricades, but they readily took up arms against the Versailles, for which a large number paid with their lives, either in battle or at the hands of the government's executioners. The roster of women Communards is impressive, including Elisabeth Dmitrieff, who organized the Women's Union for the Defense of Paris, as well as uncounted working-class women whose names are lost to us forever. Perhaps the most outstanding and militant among them was Louise Michel, who seems to have been everywhere during each of the Commune's major crises: participating in the October uprising after the surrender of Metz; orating at the clubs, where she was a familiar and inspiring figure; rousing the workers of Montmartre on March 18, when the cannons were about to be taken away; and fighting in various battles, wearing a kepi and carrying a weapon. After March 18, during the controversy over whether to pursue Thiers out of the city, Michel had even made her way to Versailles itself, merely to demonstrate that the head of state could be assassinated.

By the time the fighting came to an end, Michel had achieved a degree of distinction unequalled by any other female Communard. Since the authorities had singled her out as the leader of the mythic *pétroleuses*, who ostensibly set fire to the buildings, the troops and police combed Paris to find her. She managed to elude them completely and take refuge in the recesses of the capital. Not until December 16, when the government took her mother hostage, did she voluntarily surrender herself to the Sixth Council of War. Placed on trial, Michel defiantly shouted back at her judges:

Since it seems that every heart that beats for freedom has no right to anything but a little slug of lead, I demand my share. If you let me live, I shall never cease to cry for vengeance.<sup>28</sup>

Louise Michel's courage so impressed the spectators at her trial that she was prudently sentenced to exile instead of death. When it was suggested that she lodge an appeal for clemency, she refused, declaring that she "would have preferred death."<sup>29</sup>

Brunel, Cluseret, Eudes, Frankel, Longuet, Lefrançois, Miot, and Vaillant—all survived, and several of them later became prominent figures in the French Socialist Party. Ferré, Moreau, Rigault, Rossel, and Clément Thomas were shot by the Versailles—although Rossel was executed after leaving his hideout, a refugee from the Commune as well as the Versailles. The many thousands who were shot or killed in the barricade fighting and afterward remain an anonymous mass, their names forgotten in the history of humanity's fight for social justice. Yet they died in huge numbers as heroically as their better-known leaders.



After the barricade fighting was over, the carnage continued without respite. The prisoners of the Versaillais were slaughtered by the hundreds, even thousands, without any discrimination. Commanders like the Marquis de Galliffet simply strode up and down the ranks of the captives and arbitrarily selected individuals for immediate execution. The Paris correspondent of the *London Daily News*, observing the marquis's behavior, wrote:

It was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbours. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from ills of this world to his having a broken nose. . . . Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party told off, and the column resumed its march, leaving them behind.<sup>30</sup>

In June 1871 the *British Standard* correspondent reported that two courts-martial were shooting people at the rate of 500 a day, including women and children. Thousands of captives, marched off to the Satory encampment at Versailles, were shot indiscriminately or perished from exhaustion. The Lobeau barracks were turned into a killing ground and the corpses thrown into a shallow grave at the Place Saint Jacques or into the Seine. In some places, blood ran in a steady trickle into the gutters. So chilling and grotesque were the reports coming out of France that revulsion gave rise to protests against the slaughter, even in conventional newspapers abroad, and in time the government was obliged to replace outright executions with transportation to New Caledonia, a French colony where more than 3,000 Communards were forced to live in huts under the eyes of brutal wardens. In all, 10,000 people were condemned and confined, either within France or in French possessions abroad. Twenty thousand more, who suffered terribly through the winter of 1871-72 in ad hoc forms of confinement, were released without ever being formally charged.

As for fatalities, the most commonly accepted estimate is that 25,000 Communards were killed, although a figure of 30,000 would not be unreasonable. The Versaillais lost only 877 dead and 6,454 wounded. Most by far of the Communards who perished were executed by Thiers's troops, usually summarily, without even a pretense of courts-martial. For months after the suppression of the Commune, Paris suffered from a labor shortage due to the murder and imprisonment of its best artisans. Thiers did complete his purge of Paris—with far more brutality than even the Terror of the Great Revolution, in which, during 1793-94, about 2,600 were killed in Paris and about 17,000 in the rest of France.

## NOTES

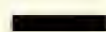
1. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*, trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. 91. Lissagaray was a participant in the Commune.
2. Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune, 1871* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 150.
3. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 90.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
5. "Appeal to the Departments," *Journal officiel* (March 20, 1871), quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 155.
6. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 146.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
8. *Journal officiel* (March 21, 1871), in *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, ed. Stewart Edwards, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 68-9.
9. Jules Vallès, in *Le Cri du Peuple* (March 30, 1871); in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 74.
10. Document 50 in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 140.
11. L. Barron, *Sous le drapeau rouge* (Paris, 1899); Document 51 in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 142.
12. *Le Social* (Mar. 31, 1871); quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 261.
13. Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 337.
14. "Declaration to the French People," originally published in English in the *London Times* (April 21, 1871); republished with corrections in *Communards of 1871*, ed. Edwards, pp. 81-3.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 168.
18. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 281.
19. Cited in Arthur Adamov, *La Commune de Paris, 18 Mars-28 Mai 1871* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1959), p. 30, emphasis in the original.
20. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 198.
21. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, pp. 164-5.
22. Cited in Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune of 1871* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 364.
23. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 309.
24. Charles Delescluze, "To the People of Paris, to the National Guards" (May 21, 1871), in *Communards of Paris*, ed. Edwards, p. 160.
25. Lissagaray, *History of the Commune*, p. 314.
26. Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 319.
27. Blanqui, "Instruction for an Armed Uprising," quoted in Edwards, *Paris Commune*, p. 319.
28. Quoted in Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries*, trans. James and Starr Atkinson (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), p. 170.



29. Ibid.

30. London *Daily News* (June 8, 1871), quoted in Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, note 1, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22: *Marx and Engels, 1870-71* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 356.

PART VII



# **PROLETARIAN SOCIALISMS**





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## CHAPTER 32 The Rise of Proletarian Socialisms

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In the wake of the Commune, French socialism would never be the same. The Jacobin mystique, which had lingered among workers and radical intellectuals for so many decades, disappeared almost completely, and the antiroyalism and anticlericalism that had formerly been the province of the Jacobins were absorbed by the more conventional republican parties—notably the so-called Radicals—who commanded a considerable following among shopkeepers, professionals, well-to-do peasants, and even workers. Proudhon's individualistic "mutualism," with its hostility to associations, strikes, and even trade unions, also lost its popular following, to be replaced by syndicalism—an explicitly collectivistic form of federalism structured around trade unions and the most sweeping of working-class initiatives, the general strike. This shift, as we have seen, had been under way well in advance of the Paris Commune. As G.D.H. Cole observes,

against the Proudhonists in the French Trade Union movement were ranged the "collectivists," headed by Eugène Varlin; and by 1871 the collectivists were the dominant group in the Paris area, as well as at Lyons and Marseilles. Varlin, no doubt, had at bottom a great deal more in common with Proudhon than with Marx; but on the issue that was uppermost in the 1860s he and his group found themselves on the same side as Marx because they favoured collective ownership of the means of production.

Varlin, as we have seen, also advanced a program that was distinctly communalistic, with its emphasis on confederations of municipalities, as well as syndicalistic, opening a new vista for libertarians who had formerly been focused on individualistic forms of action. But

Varlin and his associates were by no means "collectivists" in the sense of standing for *State* ownership of land and other means of production. They wanted the land and the instruments of large-scale production to be owned by the local Communes, or when necessary, by federal agencies set up by the communes. They wanted the actual operations of production to be carried on as far as possible by Co-operative societies emanating from the Trade Unions; ... the Trade Unions were thus of fundamental importance in their vision of the new society; indeed they tended, although not very explicitly, to think of the Commune of the future as resting rather on the federated syndicates (trade unions) of the locality than on any political foundations.<sup>1</sup>

Tragically, however, Varlin was only thirty-two when he was murdered by the Versailles. Had he lived for another thirty years, this immensely gifted man—in view of his level of insight and his personal popularity with workers—might have had an incalculable effect upon the trajectory of European socialism, possibly pushing it toward a communalistic development as well as a syndicalist one.

## LESSONS OF THE COMMUNE

Significantly, most of the interpretations of the Commune—the "lessons" that the revolutionary theorists of the day derived from it—were institutional rather than economic. The Blanquists pointed to its failures as evidence of the need for a highly centralized, indeed dictatorial, type of regime to ruthlessly crush the bourgeoisie, and they were still enamored of the idea of a Committee of Public Safety. Anarchists, for their part, emphasized the federalist orientation of the Commune and criticized its statist "deformations," as they saw them—namely, its system of representation, as distinguished from a mass democracy—and in varying degrees, Bakunin and Kropotkin lamented its failure to take more socialistic economic measures.

But the Commune's anarchist supporters seemed to understand that Paris had made a clearly communalist revolution in the spring of 1871. Despite its failure to place a strong emphasis on class differences, its hazy celebration of republicanism, and its appeals to patriotism, the Commune, taken as a whole, was as close to a "libertarian municipalist"<sup>2</sup> phenomenon as Paris had come since the heyday of the sectional democracy in 1793. The April 20 program, as we have seen, asserted the right of French communes to function autonomously based on the "contract of association" to "secure the unity of France"; it affirmed the "inherent rights" of the Paris Commune to vote its own budgets and taxes, and to create its own administrative, judicial, and police



apparatus; not only would elections be free, but voters would also have "the permanent right of control and revocation" of all magistrates—in short, the *mandat impératif*, in which delegates were subject to recall if they failed to follow the wishes of their electors. Citizens were to enjoy the right of "permanent intervention into Communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas and the free defense of their interests."<sup>3</sup>

Marx's appraisal of the Commune in *The Civil War in France*, while understandably supportive of it against the imprecations rained upon it by the international bourgeoisie, was anomalous in his work as a whole, at least in terms of its attitude toward state power. These writings, which he prepared for the London bureau of the International (and which form most of the *Civil War* book), tend to downplay state power.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the Administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workmen's wages. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of State disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State was laid into the hands of the Commune.<sup>4</sup>

Marx was careful not to claim that the Commune had abandoned all the functions of a state—quite to the contrary, he took note of its statist features—but the libertarian ambience of his description is evident, contrasting sharply with his normally centralistic statist views. So deprecatory of the state generally was this book, however, and so ebullient was it about the Commune's anarchistic demand for communal liberties that James Guillaume, Bakunin's closest collaborator in the International, ironically regarded it as evidence of a capitulation to anarchists in the IWMA. Later Marxist leaders even cited Marx's description of the Commune as the model par excellence of a proletarian dictatorship.

Actually, what Marx regarded as important about the Commune was not that it had eliminated the state as such but that it had completely smashed the

bourgeois state, with its huge bureaucracy, its military and judicial institutions, and its executive and legislative apparatus, replacing it, so he believed, with a more or less working-class state based on broad popular involvement. What he heralded in the Commune was not any antistatism but in fact a new statist dispensation, one in which the working class and its supporters acquired sweeping political rights and authority—or what he called “the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>9</sup> What makes Marx’s praise of the Commune in *The Civil War in France* anomalous is that he appears to have envisioned this “dictatorship” as institutionally communalistic rather than republican, for in nearly all his earlier writings on the state, the “workers’ state” was to be marked more by republican features than by quasi-anarchistic, communalistic, and confederalistic ones.

Another consequence of the Commune’s defeat was that it opened the way for the introduction of Marxism into France, although it did not take a firm hold among the working class for several generations. And perhaps no single individual contributed more to its dissemination in the country than Jules Guesde, who edited the newspaper *Les Droits de l’homme* in 1870–71. Because his newspaper had expressed support for the Commune, Guesde was obliged to take refuge in Switzerland after its defeat. There he initially became an anarchist, but he was soon won over to Marx’s ideas of socialism and became one of its most zealous proselytizers. Indeed, although Marx had a coterie in France that dated back to the beginnings of the International (including two sons-in-law, Paul Lafargue and Charles Longuet), it was Guesde who ultimately gave the French labor movement a strong Marxist imprint. Starting in 1877, as soon as he returned to France, he began publishing a periodical, *L’Égalité*, which gradually evolved from a politically hybrid journal influenced by Blanquism, anarchism, and reformist socialism to a Marxist one. After visiting Marx and Engels in London in 1880, he returned to France determined to build a centralized, unified Marxist party modeled entirely on the German Socialist Workers’ Party, and within five years he managed to pull together the centralized, even authoritarian Parti Ouvrier Français (French Workers’ Party). Although a centralized political party was alien to the markedly decentralistic spirit of the French working class, the Parti Ouvrier prospered, and the Guesdists became a major force on the French revolutionary socialist landscape.

Finally, the Commune was instrumental in bringing about the end of the IWMA. With the suppression of the Commune, the revolutionary elements in the French working class were either massacred, imprisoned, or sent into exile, where they remained for most of the 1870s. Their absence from the International immensely weakened the federalist influences within it, and the balance of forces shifted markedly in Marx’s favor. He made the most of it—in a manner that was far from laudable—to expel his Bakuninist opponents.

This confrontation occurred at the International’s last united congress,



which met at the Hague in September 1872. Breaking with precedent, Marx personally attended the Hague Congress and, with Engels's support, dredged up gossip allegations that Bakunin had used fraudulent methods to gain money. Nor did he dissociate himself from unsavory rumors that the Russian had been a secret tsarist agent. Marx was now able to use the very power that the Basel Congress had granted to the General Council—ironically, with Bakunin's ardent support—to decide what organizations could legitimately belong to the International. Single-mindedly determined to have Bakunin expelled, Marx and the Blanquists (in a completely unholy and short-lived alliance) outmaneuvered the anarchist patriarch and succeeded in expelling him from the International, together with his supporter James Guillaume. (The majority that Marx mustered against Bakunin included the votes of five delegates from specious organizations who represented nothing but themselves.) Thereafter, in a deliberate attempt to kill off the International, which had been threatening to drift toward Bakunin's anarchism, Marx gained the Congress's assent to move the General Council to the United States, where eventually, as he had expected, the IWMA faded into oblivion.

If this measure essentially ended the International, it did not put an end to the conflicting tendencies in socialism that followed upon the failure of the Commune. To the contrary: Marx's renown as the "Red Terrorist Doctor" (as he was called in the British press) was now assured. Bakunin's supporters, in turn, tried to create a more decentralized "Antiauthoritarian International" on the continent. Shortly after the Hague Congress, the new International convened at St-Imier in Switzerland, composed not only of anarchists and anarchist sympathizers but moderate British trade unionists, united primarily by their enmity for the General Council. Unlike the Council-dominated IWMA, the successor St-Imier International was intended to be a voluntary federation of autonomous national federations, each of which was free to follow the policy it preferred. In time, the British moderates drifted away, leaving the anarchists almost entirely on their own.

The last essentially anarchist congress, held a year after Bakunin's death in 1876, was marked by the ascendancy of Kropotkin's anarchist communism. In contrast to Proudhon and Bakunin, with their tolerance for nonexploitative forms of private property, Kropotkin's tendency called for the complete socialization of the means of production and adopted the old communist maxim "From each according to ability, to each according to need." The individualistic artisanal socialism of Proudhon and the collectivistic artisanal socialism of Bakunin thus gave way among many anarchists to libertarian communism.

What is significant about this shift is that Kropotkin's libertarian communism expressly or implicitly presupposed a technologically advanced society. Its underpinning was the conviction that industry and science had

advanced sufficiently to allow the distribution of goods to be guided by needs rather than by the amount of work individuals contributed to society. Anarcho-communists, as they came to be called, no longer thought in terms of the private ownership and association of small-scale enterprises (although Kropotkin himself was a strong proponent of a human scale in all things, from machines to communities); rather, they held the view that the distribution of goods in a communistic society would require advanced technologies, at the very least, and did not oppose the establishment of factories and mass production, with which Proudhon and to some extent Bakunin had been uncomfortable. In short, Kropotkin's version of anarchism made it possible for anarchists to adapt themselves to the new working class, the industrial proletariat, and even hoped to play a leading role in its activities. This adaptation was all the more necessary because capitalism was now transforming not only European society but the very nature of the European labor movement itself.

## THE NEW ECONOMY

In 1870 France and Germany, as we have seen, were both still structured around a predominantly artisan and peasant economy. Like the French artisans, the majority of German workers were either masters who owned small workshops or else journeymen who learned their crafts by going from town to town in what was an essentially preindustrial economy. During the 1870s, however, new enterprises were expanding enormously in both countries. Following the Franco-Prussian War, German industry leaped forward at a dazzling pace, so that within only a matter of decades, Germany was the industrial giant of the European continent—followed by French industry as a laggard cousin.

A comparison of the industrial growth in both countries is basic to assessing not only their respective economies but their respective labor movements and social ideologies. In 1870 Germany produced only slightly more pig iron (1.2 million tons) than France (1.1 million), although it was still only about a fifth of Britain's output (nearly 6 million). But by 1913, German pig iron production had vastly outstripped not only French production (16.7 million tons compared with 5.1 million) but British (10.2 million) and was exceeded only by American production (nearly 31 million). Germany also took the lead throughout Europe in the production of the new dyes and chemical compounds that were becoming indispensable to modern industrial production, and soon led the continent in production of electrical goods. By 1913, German concerns produced approximately three-quarters of all the dyes used in the world, as well as new medicinals.



Of huge importance in this economic tableau was the size of the German industrial enterprises and their degree of capital concentration. As pig iron and steel production soared, the number of enterprises that produced them became smaller, while those few grew ever larger in plant size and number of workers employed. Although the number of blast furnaces declined over time, between 1880 to 1912 their output rocketed from 11,000 to 50,000 tons per furnace—a nearly fivefold increase in productivity. Similar developments occurred at varying paces throughout most German industrial enterprises as a whole. The number of German workers in factories employing 51 or more increased from 1.5 million in 1882 to nearly 5 million in 1907, while the number employed in smaller enterprises (up to 50 persons) remained substantially the same.

Craft manufacturing, by the same token, declined precipitously. In 1875 the number of German woolen handloom weavers numbered 47,000, but by 1907 it had declined to only 19,000. (By contrast, in 1903 French handlooms still outnumbered French power looms by 50,000 to 38,000.) Thus, although German artisans were still a presence in the years immediately preceding the First World War, they were dwarfed in numbers and importance by industrial proletarians, who were now becoming predominant in the European working class as a whole.

France's development was more complex. Small-scale French manufacturing tenaciously held on to its traditional ground, and its artisanal labor force remained sizable. The lead that France retained in quality luxury goods and artistic works gave the country cultural hegemony over other industrial countries, but it now lagged behind in economic power. Doubtless geographical factors militated against the expansion of French steel production: although France was very rich in iron ore, the lack of good coal from which to produce coke and the considerable distances that lay between iron and coal mines made French steel production less profitable than German. France thus tended to export her excellent ores rather than smelt them and was obliged to turn to Belgium and Germany for a large part of her coal. Thus, even as the nineteenth century drew to close, a two-tiered economy still persisted in France with relatively little change. To some extent French peasants drifted from the land to cities and industrial centers, as rural people did throughout Western Europe, but the number of food cultivators did not decline significantly: from 48 percent of the French population in 1866, they fell to only 41 percent in 1911—that is to say, a mere 7 percent decline in about half a century of hectic change in most of Western Europe. The number of small landholdings actually increased between 1892 and 1908, from 28.6 million to 31.5 million acres, and traditional rural constraints on the expansion of the domestic market were still very much at work, albeit less tenaciously than in past years.

But the French economy was gearing up to produce an appreciable number of industrial proletarians. By the turn of the century, mechanization almost

completely replaced handwork in the manufacture of most fabrics (although the silk industry still used a large number of handlooms), giving rise to large textile factories. In Normandy, for example, the production of cotton cloth, from spinning to weaving, was performed completely by machines, as were woolen fabrics in mills in various parts France. The number of steam engines more than tripled between 1870 and 1913, from 27,000 to 81,000. The giant steel—and armaments—plants in the center of the country, such as the Le Creusot works, as well as the textile plants in the west and the rich iron-ore mines in French Lorraine, involved very large-scale operations. Although France uniquely retained its tier of relatively small workshops and a patronal form of capitalism, the country nonetheless ranked second on the continent as an industrial power and fourth in the world in terms of economic strength.

The lead on the continent in all these fields fell to Germany, whose giant steel plants, machine shops, and chemical and electrical enterprises by far overshadowed those of France and England. In the years leading up to the First World War, Germany, united into an immense empire by the Hohenzollern monarchs of Prussia, became the greatest industrial power in the world after the United States. Her industries were not only highly concentrated but highly rationalized, equipped with the most advanced technologies. By the same token, the German industrial proletariat was proportionately larger, with respect to the rest of the population, than was the French, where industrial workers were still a minority. Thus, within the span of little more than a generation, a new economy had emerged, and with it a new working class—an unskilled proletariat that brought nothing but its own labor power (or capacity to work) to the service of a new kind of bourgeoisie—the owners of large capital-intensive factories, whose operations were based on a narrowing division of labor in which mechanization replaced skills. In this mutually interdependent industrial machine, it became impossible to identify the specific contribution of the worker to the making of a finished product, in contrast to the artisanal worker. Moreover, the industrial worker had no independent means of obtaining an income apart from factory earnings, in contrast to the traditional artisan, who often owned his own workshop and marketed his own products.

The personal independence of the skillful artisan, the deep sense of self-worth that comes with the possession of tools and handworked machines, and the pride and dignity of the self-sustained craftsman all but disappeared from the sensibility of the unskilled modern industrial worker. Where the artisan was able to encounter his own kind in favored cafés frequented by men of his own trade, and where he possessed an extraordinary degree of literacy that made radical ideas accessible to him, the proletariat commonly frequented a tavern where alcohol was a source of solace rather than the occasion for sociability. Neglected by society, even viewed haughtily by skilled artisans, the industrial



worker was woefully uneducated, often even rustic—uncomfortable with industrial lifeways and their rhythms.

## THE CHANGE IN SOCIALISM

This growing shift from an artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism had meant producers' cooperatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations, although for master craftsmen it meant mutual aid societies that acknowledged their autonomy as private producers. For the industrial proletariat, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organization that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own. These distinctions led to two different interpretations of the "social question" or, in the language of 1848, the nature of a "democratic and social republic." The more progressive craftsmen of the nineteenth century had tried to form networks of cooperatives, based on individually or collectively owned shops, and a market knitted together by a moral agreement to sell commodities according to a "just price" or the amount of labor that was necessary to produce them. Presumably such small-scale ownership and shared moral precepts would abolish exploitation and greedy profit-taking. The class-conscious proletariat of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, on the other hand, thought in terms of the complete socialization of the means of production, including land, and even of abolishing the market as such, distributing goods according to needs rather than labor.

It was partly in adaptation to the industrial worker, engaged in mass production by the thousands in single plants, that the new kinds of socialism were formulated. They advocated public ownership of the means of production, whether by the state or by the working class organized in trade unions. A socialist movement that tried to advance this program to workers necessarily had to create a mass organization, such as a trade union, party, council, or all of these to one degree or another. It would have been difficult, albeit not impossible, to address thousands of industrial workers, let alone mobilize them in loosely organized local societies, clubs, or mutual benefit societies of the kind that existed among artisans. But such mass organizations tended to become breeding grounds for bureaucracies, whose functionaries often had professional interests that stood at odds with those of the workers they were supposed to service, and statesmenlike leaders who often resembled in mentality and behavior the very bourgeois politicians they were expected to oppose. Thus it was capitalism itself that was changing both the scale and the

visions on which socialists of all kinds—revolutionary anarchists and Marxists as well as moderate socialists—based their social theories and organizing practices.

Whether these changes were an improvement over past conditions or a deterioration, their development was inexorable as the nineteenth century phased into the twentieth. But the shift from a predominantly artisan economy to an industrial one should not be permitted to obscure the fact that modern industry—the huge plants and mills as well as the adjunct workshops that were still needed—overwhelmingly employed untrained and often illiterate proletarians, who were engaged in routinized and unskilled labor. In fact, the artisan persisted even within the factory as well as in the specialized workshops adjacent to it. He was usually a skilled metalworker or fabric designer, a maintenance man or a schooled technician—that is, an *artisan-proletarian*, who shared an independent spirit and a high degree of literacy with the craft masters and journeymen of the old artisanal economy.

Commonly this artisan-proletarian, who appears in the historical record as early as 1848 under the name of *mécanicien* in France, was a metalworker who operated complex machinery within the factory; he could also be a printer, furniture maker, leather worker, or similar skilled craftsman. According to Charles Tilly and Lynn N. Lees in their monograph "The People of June, 1848," surveying those who were arrested and convicted for participating in the June uprising, the artisan-proletarian cohort constituted the second-largest trade group, second only to construction workers.<sup>6</sup> It was principally from these artisan-proletarians that worker militants were recruited, providing both the factory and the neighborhood with their authentic proletarian vanguard. More often males than females (women were rarely permitted to acquire the skills and schooling needed to engage in well-paying, complex productive tasks), they were most susceptible to socialistic ideas and were likely to be consulted by unskilled workers for guidance in demonstrations, strikes, and uprisings as well as to articulate their demands. They would come into their own as the most militant, indeed revolutionary workers by the turn of the century, especially during the Russian and German revolutions between 1917 and 1923.

## PROLETARIAN SOCIALISM: SYNDICALISM

The ideas of Karl Marx were by no means the only tendency in socialism to provide guidance for a movement appropriate for the industrial proletariat. While Marx's contribution was indeed enormous, other proletarian socialisms coexisted with it until the success of the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 gave



sweeping preeminence to Lenin's version of Marxist ideas over all other movements for proletarian emancipation.

In fact, Marxian socialism never gained a major footing in Great Britain. The English proletariat was drawn to other socialisms, especially to notions of a peaceful transformation to the public ownership of property, ranging from the municipal to the parliamentary level, and commonly structured around cooperatives and associations. British socialist movements largely based their hopes for a new society on legislative means, not on strikes and insurrections. By contrast, in France, proletarian socialism still retained strong federalist and antipolitical tendencies that were antithetical to Guesde's emphasis on centralism and participation in national elections, slowly giving rise, in the 1880s and 1890s, to a major movement—revolutionary syndicalism—that advanced the general strike as the main weapon for basic social change.

Doctrinally, syndicalists opposed the capitalist system and all its instruments of power, particularly the state, which they viewed as the principal source of society's ills. They strongly believed it had to be completely dismantled if humanity were to be freed of exploitation and oppression. Eschewing parliamentarism as a corruptive strategy for a revolutionary movement, they condemned political attempts to participate in, let alone reform, the state apparatus, as a way of honoring its legitimacy. Hence they opposed the establishment of political parties and firmly refused to participate in elections. Rather, they called for the collective acquisition of economic power by the proletariat, the outright expropriation of the bourgeoisie, and the management of industrial and agricultural enterprises through democratically elected workers' and farmers' committees, all of whose delegates were expected to function according to the *mandat impératif*—that is, subject to instant recall. A socialistic society that was structured around syndicalist principles would be one that was managed by industrial, craft, and agricultural workers through confederated enterprises organized into *syndicats* or trade unions.

Syndicalist unions, in turn, were to be organized in two parallel structures (a Proudhonist scheme) based respectively on geography and industry. Geographically, the syndicates would link together workers' delegates in a given town, region, and country in administrative confederal labor councils. Industrially, the syndicates would unite the delegates from enterprises within the same trade or industry in a pyramid of industrial confederal councils. Thus the diverse plants in a given region, preferably a municipality, each managed by its own duly elected factory committee, would be linked by one labor council with all the other industries and agricultural enterprises in that area. Simultaneously, each particular factory—say, a steel plant—would be linked to all the other steel plants in the country in a confederal council of delegates from their specific industry. At the apex of this parallel system of confederated unions, there were to be two "chambers" of delegates—one for the geographical

confederation, the other for the trade confederation. Together they would administer a syndicalist society. These bodies at the higher levels of the confederation, syndicalists argued—the municipal, regional, and national councils—would diminish in decision-making authority the farther removed they were from the municipal or local councils. Indeed, all the important policy decisions affecting society would be made by the factories, farms, and shops that formed the economic base of a given area and industry.

How was this confederal syndicalist society, based on trade unions, to be attained? Syndicalists were generally agreed that once the working class—rural as well as industrial—was mobilized into confederal labor unions in sufficient numbers, they would declare a revolutionary general strike that would paralyze the capitalist system. The army would have difficulty attacking the strikers because syndicalist transportation workers would block the movement of troops; the state would be unable to function in other respects because its administration would be brought to a halt by the general strike; and finally the bourgeoisie would be brought to its knees because it would cease to make profit or even acquire the raw materials needed to keep its enterprises working.

Capitalism and the state, in effect, would be paralyzed and therefore compelled to capitulate to a united, purposeful, and revolutionary working class. Few syndicalists were so naïve as to believe that this capitulation would be brought about peacefully; almost certainly, the state would try to use every means at its disposal to break the general strike, employing troops wherever it could to forcefully cajole the workers back to their factories. But the workers, simultaneously arming themselves and appealing to the soldiers as "brothers," could hope to eventually win out by a combination of strikes, propaganda, and where necessary, outright force. At that point the new society would emerge in which the stratified confederations—geographical and trade—would administer all economic and public affairs within their given municipalities, regions, and nations.<sup>7</sup>

This account of syndicalist theory is admittedly highly schematic and even idealized. Syndicalist ideas emerged gradually over the nineteenth century, from the "Grand Holiday" proposed by British workers in 1833, through the multitude of ideas proposed by artisanal socialists, to the use of general strikes against an impending war. Syndicalism was neither predominantly English nor French in origin but developed accretively over the span of nearly a century. It emerged in a transitional period, when there were still enough artisans—and certainly enough of the artisanal tradition—to create a union movement that was localist in its orientation, even expressly decentralistic. At the same time, industrial workers were becoming sufficiently numerous to require a high degree of coordination in their actions, culminating if necessary in regional or even national general strikes.

As a result of this gradual development, the specific ideas of syndicalism



were highly diverse by the time the doctrine became preeminent among French workers in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Nor was it accepted in a very clear-cut form even by self-avowed syndicalist workers, let alone by the French working class as a whole. Some workers within the syndicalist fold wanted their unions to be concerned exclusively with conventional bread-and-butter issues and simply ignored the goal of the general strike. Other workers were attracted by the movement's emphasis on localism, reflecting the artisans' customary orientation toward their own communities. Finally, still others adopted the general strike more as an alternative to political measures than because of its revolutionary implications. They were sufficiently disenchanted with the Third Republic to be alienated from political action in any form; indeed, at the time when syndicalism emerged, the French government was wracked by internal scandals, monarchist and clerical attacks, an attempt at a Bonapartist-type coup, and the ugly Dreyfus affair, a patent judicial frame-up in which the hated general staff of the French army falsely accused a Jewish officer of performing acts of espionage, for which he was convicted and sent to Devil's Island.

In 1884 the Third Republic once again legalized the right of workers to form trade unions, which quickly gave rise to the establishment of a wide variety of them. Although the largest unions were controlled by the Church and the employers, two years later, in 1886, French workers established the independent National Federation of Syndicates (NFS), or trade unions, which was quickly taken over by the Guesdists, finally providing Marxists with a tangible base in the French labor movement. Not surprisingly, the NFS became closely associated with the Guesdist *Parti Ouvrier*.

In addition to trade unions, the late 1880s and the 1890s also saw a revival of the *bourses du travail*, or employment centers, where workers and potential employers met to negotiate wages and working conditions for jobs. Subsidized by the municipalities, these labor exchanges had been in existence in many towns in France for years, but after the legalization of unions, they expanded their functions enormously, becoming centers where the new unions held meetings, organized educational courses and lectures, established libraries, and disseminated information about jobs and social ideas. They were usually under the control of the various unions in a given trade—such as baking or tailoring—within a particular city. Finally a Federation of Bourses du Travail was set up in 1892, which became the leading syndicalistic rival of Guesde's National Federation of Syndicates.

The guiding spirit behind the newly expanded *bourses* was Fernand Pelloutier, a tubercular young intellectual who managed to break away from his stringent Catholic background and bring his talents to the service of working-class causes. Initially a member of the *Parti Ouvrier*, Pelloutier broke with its injunction against the general strike as a revolutionary tactic and in 1893 became an adherent of Kropotkin's anarchist communism. More than any

single individual, this devoted man promoted the bourses as educational nuclei for a libertarian communist society, indeed, firmly opposing all attempts to turn them into political entities for parliamentary ends. The task of the bourses, in his eyes, was to inform and educate workers, encourage them to take the initiative in fostering social change, and impart to them the skills and knowledge they would need to administer a syndicalist society. Between 1894 and 1902, largely under his direction, the Federation of Bourses du Travail became the largest independent workers' organization in France. Although Pelloutier was not an insurrectionary, the Federation became the rallying center for militants who favored revolutionary industrial action over the parliamentary strategy of Guesde's socialists. After Pelloutier died in 1901 at the age of thirty-four, he was to be revered by the French working class, which treasured his memory for generations to come.

Throughout the 1890s, between the syndicalistic Federation of Bourses du Travail and the Marxian-socialistic National Federation of Syndicates, the question of strategy—of direct economic action through the general strike versus strict parliamentarism—was debated intensively. The Marxists, in fact, were no less critical of the syndicalists than the syndicalists were of the Marxists. In a sharp attack on Spanish Bakuninists, Engels had mocked syndicalism as completely unrealistic, because, as he wrote, the workers would quickly use up their strike funds before the capitalists would surrender their control of the economy. Engels, like Marx after him, totally ignored the insurrectionary role that the strike was meant to play. Guesde, for his part, vehemently opposed the strike as a step toward insurrection, which he felt was no longer feasible in Western societies in view of the sophistication of armaments and military tactics.

Neither Engels nor Guesde, however, were able to lay these differences to rest. At the 1892 Congress of the National Federation of Syndicates at Marseille, a bitter conflict erupted between the proponents of the general strike and supporters of parliamentarism, and over the furious objections of the Guesdists, the Congress passed a resolution favoring the general strike. Since 1890, the struggle for support of the general strike within the Parti Ouvrier had been led by Jean Allemane, a worker-Communard who had been deported to New Caledonia after being taken prisoner on a barricade. Along with his supporters, the Allemanists, he figured very significantly in the subsequent syndicalist radicalization of the French trade union movement. Although the Allemanists accepted many basic theoretical concepts of the Marxists, they were virtual anarchists in their outlook and consistent revolutionaries. They fought their way to the leadership of the Parti Ouvrier against the Guesdists and the so-called "Possibilists," led by the former anarchist-terrorist Paul Brousse, who was moving steadily toward a reformist position—advocating local municipal control within the framework of the nation-state.



At length, at a congress in Nantes in 1894, the Guesdists withdrew entirely from the National Federation of Syndicates and tried to form a labor organization of their own. The sentiments of the workers in the NFS, however, remained mainly with the syndicalists. In 1895, the NFS and the Federation of Bourses du Travail merged to establish an entirely new organization, the Confédération Général du Travail (CGT) or National Confederation of Labor. It was a complete victory for syndicalism over parliamentarism. As a revolutionary syndicalist federation, the CGT eschewed all reliance on parliamentary measures to advance the interests of the working class and adopted the general strike as its cardinal weapon for the transformation of society.

Before the establishment of a unified French Socialist Party in 1905 under the leadership of Jean Jaurès, the socialist parties in France numbered five: Guesdists, Allemanists (who had split from their syndicalistic comrades), Broussists, Blanquists, and independents. Their history, laden with internecine warfare, is too tangled to unscramble in a few sentences, but in 1896 they were at least able to agree that in elections, while they could oppose one another on the first ballot, whichever socialist candidate survived would gain their united votes on the second.

These divisions and the growing parliamentary orientation of the socialists had little influence on the newly formed Confédération National du Travail. For nearly two decades after its formation, the CGT remained a revolutionary syndicalist union, repeatedly advocating the strategy of the general strike as an alternative to parliamentary socialism. Serious French anarchists—those who were not enamored of terrorism—gained union positions in its growing apparatus and added enormously to its militancy, imbuing the CGT with a spirit of direct action and even sabotage. But the CGT was very loosely organized and marked by considerable local autonomy, its individual syndicates pulling the confederation in many different directions. Its militant, indeed revolutionary appearance to the contrary notwithstanding, the confederation remained a battleground between reformists and revolutionaries, as well as those who preached a compromise between the two wings, and still others who adventuristically demanded small strikes as a kind of revolutionary gymnastics for the working class.

During its predominantly syndicalist period, the CGT conducted many major strikes that involved hundreds of thousands of workers. As Peter Stearns observes:

Despite important fluctuations, all indices of strike activity showed growing intensity during most of the [pre-World War I] period. The first attempt at a nation-wide strike occurred in 1906; the first effective industry-wide strike began with the miners' rising of 1902. During the two decades before World War I, almost every conceivable method of striking was tried, often for the

first time. None of this involved more than a minority of the working class, but it was a sizeable minority. During the whole period from 1899 through 1914, strikes by industrial and transport workers involved a total of 3,304,482 participants. Many workers struck several different times, of course; but it can be assumed that at least a million manufacturing workers went on strike at least once.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, at its peak membership in 1912, the CGT claimed to have 600,000 members, although only 450,000 paid dues to the organization. During the same years, well over fifty percent of all French unionized workers belonged to the CGT, making it the largest labor organization in the country.

But by no means should this statistic be interpreted as evidence of strong syndicalist sentiment among the French industrial proletariat. CGT militancy was undeniably attractive to the growing industrial workforce, as is evidenced by the large number of strikes that swept over the country in 1912; but it is highly unlikely that most CGT members were committed to syndicalism as a social doctrine and a revolutionary general strike. In fact, despite the fiery oratory of syndicalist leaders and the resolutions of their congresses, the CGT never tried to stage a revolutionary general strike. Nor, for that matter, did its rhetoric about direct action and calls for sabotage ever amount to much more than a nuisance for the French bourgeoisie. At the turn of the century, French workers were more prudent in dealing with their employers than their artisanal forefathers had been; indeed, many did not accept syndicalism or else they gave it a nodding acknowledgment. Of the strikes conducted by the CGT between 1899 and 1913, by far the greatest number, involving the most workers, occurred early on, in 1900, when French artisans still formed a very large percentage of the working class.

The nearest the CGT militants ever came to conducting a revolution or a initiating a revolutionary general strike was in 1910, when the railway workers on the Paris-Nord system went on strike in October. A strike committee thereupon called for a general strike, hoping that the Paris-Nord action would spread to the western division of the railroad system and finally to all industries in the country. But the strike in the western division was quickly crushed by Prime Minister Aristide Briand, himself a former anarchist and fervent advocate of the general strike who had since become a socialist parliamentarian, and what was even more demoralizing, the workers in the eastern and southern railroad divisions simply refused to join their fellow workers in the west in a strike, even within the railway system. The union's defeat was thus complete and humiliating.

Finally, as the war approached, the CGT leadership, including its bureaucratic infrastructure, drifted more and more toward the conventional trade unionism of the British variety. During and after the war the CGT turned into a



conventional bread-and-butter trade union, mainly addressing economic issues within the framework of the capitalist economy. Its anarchist and syndicalist components split away and became marginalized within the working class. Following the Russian Revolution, the French Communists took control of the union, overloading it with labor bureaucrats and a leadership that warily accommodated itself to changing Communist policies while maintaining a steady, quasi-independent hold of the union's reins. Syndicalism, which had shown so much promise in the first decade of the twentieth century, receded almost everywhere in the postwar period—except in Spain, where it became the ideology of the country's huge labor movement well into the civil war of 1936–39.

Although the French proletariat did carry out general strikes later in the twentieth century, even as late as 1995, it did not link them to revolutionary demands on any serious scale. Barricades appeared from time to time, but merely as symbols of protest, not as ramparts of insurrection. Ebullient and aggressive as the French workers remained, they have never again returned to revolutionary action.

## PROLETARIAN SOCIALISM: MARXISM

Karl Marx did not live long enough to see the profound impact his ideas had upon the world. Nor did he witness the schematization of his ideas into a quasi-religious dogma in the years following the Bolshevik seizure of power—a debasement that would certainly have appalled him. After spending about half his life in exile, mostly in London, deeply involved in organizational as well as scholarly activities, he died in 1883, and the staggering body of then-unpublished manuscripts, notes, and correspondence that he left behind, as well as the works he published during his lifetime, attest to a single-minded and remarkable commitment: to formulate a thoroughgoing critical analysis of social development, particularly of capitalism, and to advance a politics that would provide workers with the guidance needed to replace bourgeois society with socialism.

The value of his endeavor cannot be measured simply by the sheer volume of his work. Proudhon published as much, if not more, in a shorter lifespan. But in contrast to Proudhon, who often leaped into print with any passing idea that occurred to him, Marx usually published his views only after long and careful reflection. His theoretical goal was *coherence*, and he disclaimed the patently incomplete, often hazy, and poorly formulated ideas of his radical contemporaries.

From a distance of a century and a half, Marx is difficult to read today partly because the theoretical standards and literacy characteristic of his era—

influenced as it was by the high intellectual level and hopes of the Enlightenment—suffered a steady attrition in the years following his lifetime. Yet the rich insights in his writings are an immeasurable treasure that, for all their failings, thinking people can ignore only at the cost of their cultural and intellectual development.

Marx seems to have set himself two principal tasks: the first, to unmask the hidden nature of capitalist exploitation and the trajectory of the capitalist development; the second, to establish the theoretical basis for a consistently revolutionary practice. Before his writings gained influence, capitalism had successfully fashioned an image of itself as the natural economic framework for a free, juridically egalitarian, and basically just society. Despite the vast and obvious differences in wealth between bourgeois and proletarian, capitalist ideology had considerable success in presenting its economic order as based on a fixed conception of "human nature" rather than on historically conditioned class interests. Society was understood to be guided by a "natural" desire for personal gain, by which every parsimonious and hardworking individual could hope to attain material security, independence, and even wealth, irrespective of the social status into which (usually) he was born. Bourgeois apologists, in effect, regarded capitalist society not so much as a system of social relations as an agglomeration of competitive individuals, each autonomously capable of making his (or less commonly, her) fortune through free enterprise.

Adam Smith, perhaps the most moralistic of the classical economists, had added to this ideology the notion of an "invisible hand" of competition, in which the self-interest of each individual allegedly redounded to the general good. Capitalism was thus extolled as the rational fulfillment of thousands of years of human development—a truly free society in the sense of finally giving full expression to individual self-interest. Self-interest itself acquired a beneficent and socially constructive form, since the maximization of an individual's interests was said to ultimately advance the material conditions of life for all, promoting invaluable technological advances that ultimately benefited humanity, and fostering peace and mutual understanding through the worldwide growth of commerce.

Marx shattered this image, not only by decrying the injustices and cruelties of capitalism but by systematically demonstrating its inherent irrationality. Profoundly influenced by Hegel's historical and developmental way of thinking, he demonstrated that capitalism was neither naturally expressive of a basic human desire for gain nor free of inherent and potentially fatal contradictions. Far from being a classless agglomeration of self-interested individuals, Marx argued, capitalist society was torn by bitter conflicts between the proletariat and the industrial bourgeoisie. These two fundamental classes had irreconcilable interests, and their conflict would result either in the overthrow of the capitalist social order by the industrial workers, opening the



way to socialism, or—as Marx and Engels put it in *The Communist Manifesto*—in the common ruin of both classes and, by inference, the breakdown of civilized social life.

Hence, far from being a uniquely natural society that marked the culmination of history, capitalism was historically transitory, a phase (indeed, the closing phase) in humanity's long attempt to rise from animality to the full realization of its creative powers and consciousness in a rational society—one in which property would be communally owned and the production and distribution of goods would be guided entirely by the satisfaction of human needs.

Had Marx argued for communism in merely ethical terms, he would have been no more or less important than many other socialist and communist thinkers of his day. But his argument was instead far more historical and economic or, as he conceived of it, "scientific," than those of his socialist contemporaries. Not only did his writings denude capitalism of all its benign but mythic pretensions, showing how it had emerged out of the breakdown of feudalism and how the wealth and property that became socially dominant were accumulated by theft and violence. He further showed that capitalism was far more than merely a system to reward the capitalist with profit for his entrepreneurial abilities. Rather, he said, it was based on the hidden exploitation of the working class. What appeared on the surface to be a fair transaction—the exchange of wages for labor power—actually concealed the expropriation of "surplus" labor, or labor over and beyond that which workers actually required to satisfy their own needs, delivering it unknowingly to the bourgeoisie. It was precisely this objective analysis of capitalist exploitation—as opposed to moral denunciations of injustice or unfairness, intuitive criticisms of capitalism, or various notions about interest as the source of profit, often made by his socialist and Proudhonist contemporaries—that Marx regarded as the scientific component of his analysis.

In unmasking capitalism as a system of exploitation—whose real operations were concealed by myths of personal autonomy, or by the administrative contributions of capitalists to the process of production—Marx tried to show that the success of individual entrepreneurs in a necessarily competitive marketplace inevitably led to the elimination of rival capitalists and, by absorption as well as growth, to the concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands. Their "anarchic" competition for an ever greater share of the market not only gave rise to periodic economic dislocations, or crises; it was ultimately destined to produce a general, indeed chronic crisis in the entire system, in which the great mass of proletarianized people would be pitted against ever fewer capitalist magnates. In *Capital*, in a ringing passage that culminates his chapter on the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation," Marx declared that in the course of capitalist competition,

One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of production only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and this, the international character of the capitalistic régime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter on the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.<sup>9</sup>

History has yet to render a verdict on all the prognoses that Marx advanced in this passage. But what is arresting is that a book published in 1867, when artisanal production and peasant agriculture still dominated the European economy, contained such an extraordinary insight into the trajectory of capitalism, even its transformation from a relatively localized form into a global economy.

More than any contemporary work of revolutionary socialism, Marx's prognoses were overwhelmingly premised on the industrial capitalist economy; the centralization and mechanization of industry; the impossibility of managing production except along socialized lines; and the abolition of private property in all major spheres of production. Most contemporary socialist and Proudhonist theorists, by contrast, gained their support from artisans and grounded their ideas within the framework of an artisanal economy. They were unprepared to demand such a sweeping transformation of society, least of all the complete abolition of private property. As we have seen, nearly all so-called "utopian" socialists, even Owen—the most labor-oriented—as well as Proudhon—essentially sought the equitable distribution of property. Very few were prepared to exclude all capitalistic forms of private property ownership from a socialist society. Indeed, at one time or another, many socialists and Proudhonists essentially voiced the aspirations of the small-scale producer in a preindustrial world, even by appealing for collaboration between



artisans and industrial capitalists. Marx, however, addressed himself not to artisans (although he often referred to them as "proletarians") but to the industrial working class. Not surprisingly, the large proletarian parties of the late nineteenth century, like Guesde's *Parti Ouvrier*, found his views more relevant than those of any other theorist of the time.

Had Marx confined his work to the critique of capitalism and the sources of class struggle in modern society, his work would still have been of imperishable value. But contrary to the myth that he was only a theorist, Marx was deeply involved throughout his life with the workers' movements of his day, and he also advanced a concrete practice, or politics. This constitutes what he considered to be his second major contribution to socialism. Unfortunately, his politics was filled with so many ambiguities that after his death it created a mixed legacy for his followers. Indeed, clarifying what Marx had meant became a source of conflict among individuals who shared the name Marxist. As a result, various tendencies within "scientific socialism" were pitted against one another, often with grim effects on the workers' movement as a whole.

With the outbreak of the First World War, verbal disputes over Marxist politics escalated into major splits in the movement. Within the Marxist fold an immense literature emerged that denounced not only other socialist tendencies but also other Marxists, eventually leading not only to divisions but ultimately to armed struggles between self-professed Marxian movements. In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Marxists inflicted repressive actions against those who claimed to provide more authentic versions of Marx's ideas, not to speak of conflicts with non-Marxist schools of socialism.

The source of the conflict was not Marx's political writings alone. Marxist movements were by no means insulated from the bourgeois society they opposed—indeed, like the former anarchist Aristide Briand, they easily became integrated into it and eventually worked to counservail the revolutionary milieu from which they had originally emerged. Their decidedly parliamentary orientation made them particularly vulnerable to cooptation by bourgeois society, especially in the years following the defeat of the Paris Commune.

Moreover, contradictory as it may seem, Marx himself strongly favored the further development of capitalism in the nineteenth century, an outlook that excused or fostered in his followers a tendency toward accommodation to the capitalist system. Throughout his life, Marx had advanced a theory of historical development that assigned to capitalism the role of advancing technology, hopefully to a point where it would be possible to free humanity from the demanding "socially necessary" work needed for subsistence. The achievement of socialism—or more properly, its most advanced stage, communism—required that the means of production be developed to a point where human beings could be freed from material scarcity and toll to manage society and cultivate their intellectual and artistic sensibilities. Thus the development of

capitalism, particularly its revolutionary role in advancing labor-saving technology, was seen by most Marxists as a historical and economic prerequisite for the emergence of socialism.

During the revolutions of 1848-49, Marx felt that workers were obliged to render critical support for the creation of a bourgeois republic, free of all feudal encumbrances and obstacles to free trade and nationhood. They were even expected to subordinate their own movements in the interest of advancing capitalist development in relatively undeveloped countries. Only later, in the "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," did Marx and Engels call for the establishment of a workers' party that aimed to establish its own "revolutionary workers' governments, whether in the form of municipal committees and municipal councils or in the form of workers' clubs and workers' committees."<sup>10</sup> This party, Marx and Engels now believed, should remain independent of all permanent alliances with the bourgeoisie and well-off peasants.

But this document, which became pivotal in decades of disputes among Marxists, was itself a source of ambiguity. It trailed off in programmatic demands to escalate bourgeois-democratic proposals for more equitable taxes, the nationalization of railways and factories, and state debts. No further mention was made of "revolutionary workers' governments" or workers' "municipal committees and municipal councils." Indeed, the workers were abjured from proposing "any directly communistic measures."<sup>11</sup> Thus, except for their writings on the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels advanced the demand for a highly centralized—indeed, antifederalist—republic as the political goal of a workers' party.

Marx's writings on the Commune, as we have seen, were a further source of ambiguity. At best, they may be regarded as a short-lived flirtation with federalism. And in a letter to Domela Nieuwenhuis that he wrote shortly before his death, Marx dismissed the Commune as a needless and wasteful municipal uprising, "of one city in exceptional circumstances," that could have been avoided—and should have been—had the Communards shown better judgment in their dealings with the National Assembly.<sup>12</sup>

To complicate matters further: a cardinal theme in Marx's praise for the Commune was the need to completely smash the bourgeois parliamentary state. But he later expressed ambiguous views about even that goal and suggested instead that in certain capitalist countries the working class could take power through the existing capitalistic electoral machinery—removing the very need for insurrection. In September 1872, Marx noted that there are different roads by which the working class could achieve "political supremacy."

We know that the institutions, customs and traditions in the different countries have to be taken into account, and we do not deny the existence of



countries like America, England, and ... Holland, where the workers may achieve their aims by peaceful means. That being true we must also admit that in most countries on the Continent it is force which must be the lever of our revolution; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers.<sup>12</sup>

This ambiguity became even more disturbing when Engels, later in life, added France to Marx's list. In fact, shortly before his death in 1895, Engels wrote a new introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*—Marx's work on the 1848 Revolution—that seemed to deprecate the military feasibility of street fighting by armed workers against trained armies. Others were even more eager to vitiate insurrection: over Engels's protests, Karl Kautsky, the editor of the German Social Democratic theoretical organ, *Die Neue Zeit*, watered down the introduction, leaving the impression that insurrectionary measures were completely obsolete—and, by inference, that parliamentary means were the preferred road to "revolutionary" social change. In a remarkably pedestrian interpretation of syndicalist doctrines, Engels, as we have seen, also contended that the general strike was destined to fail as a means for changing society because the workers would run out of strike funds.

There are sufficient passages in their collected works to justify a portrayal of Marx and Engels as either evolutionary or revolutionary in their views about the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Nor can we tell with certainty what kinds of institutions they finally thought would replace the parliamentary system if a workers' party took power: the equivalent of a workers' House of Representatives or Chamber of Deputies? Municipal committees and councils? Workers' clubs (the institutions of choice in Parisian revolutions) and committees? What can be said with certainty is that Marx favored a strongly centralized workers' state, as distinguished from confederations, to administer economic and social life—and, as his behavior in the International showed, a highly centralized party apparatus to lead the socialist movement.

The Marx-Engels writings provided ample justification for the Guesdist argument that the sole way for the workers to gain state power was by parliamentary methods rather than by a general strike or insurrection, as they also did for Rosa Luxemburg and V.I. Lenin's commitment to an armed proletarian uprising. It is not surprising that, as European Marxist parties were established, they became primarily parliamentary machines for electing candidates to public office in the bourgeois state—leading to bitter disputes with the remaining minority of Marxian revolutionaries who, with growing anguish, felt that their most cherished ideals were being betrayed by reformists.

## NOTES

1. G.D.H. Cole, *Socialist Thought*, vol. 2: *Marxism and Anarchism* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 168.
2. For an exposition of libertarian municipalism, see Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities* (1986; London: Cassell, 1996).
3. Originally published in English in the *London Times* (April 21, 1871), with corrections in Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of 1871*, Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), pp. 81-3.
4. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 22: *Marx-Engels 1870-71* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 331.
5. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 24: *Marx and Engels 1874-1883* (New York: International Publishers, 1989), p. 95.
6. Charles Tilly and Lynn H. Lees, "The People of June, 1848," in *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic*, ed. Roger Price (London: Croom Helm, 1975).
7. The idea of two parallel confederations—one linking local or municipal trades, the other linking industries—was pioneered by Proudhon in *De Principe fédératif* (1863), volume 15 of *Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1959). He called the industrial structure "fédération agricole-industrielle." But Proudhon would have opposed the general strike, insurrections, local economic strikes, and revolutionary militancy associated with syndicalism, which makes the extent of his contribution to the doctrine highly arguable.
8. Peter A. Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), p. 5.
9. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Charles H. Kerr, 1906; republished by New York: Modern Library, n.d.), pp. 836-7. Due in no small part to Engels's role in preparing it, this translation preserves Marx's Hegelian modes of expression better than others.
10. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" (or "Address of the Central Authority to the League") in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx-Engels 1849-1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), pp. 277-87.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
12. Marx to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (February 22, 1881), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 46: *Marx and Engels 1880-1883* (New York: International Publishers, 1992), p. 66.
13. Karl Marx, "On the Hague Congress," originally published in *La Liberté*, no. 37 (September 15, 1872), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 23: *Marx and Engels, 1871-1874* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), p. 255; emphasis added.



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## CHAPTER 33 The Social Democratic Interregnum

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Despite the considerable public reputation Karl Marx acquired as the "red terrorist doctor" who guided the International during the Paris Commune, his most important writings and theories had only limited influence during his lifetime. By the time of his death in 1883 in London, *Capital* had been translated into only two languages—Russian and French—and Marxism as a credo was largely unknown except among small groups of radical intellectuals. Virtually ignored in England, it was popularized to a limited extent in France due to the efforts of the indefatigable Guesde. For the rest of the continent, Marxism was too exotic to gain wide acceptance. Italians, Spaniards, and Russians were more strongly influenced by anarchism, as were a sizable number of French syndicalists, who, around the turn of the century, formed the most militant and impressive working-class movement in Europe.

Apart from Guesde's small Parti Ouvrier, founded in 1882, no Marxist party came into existence while Marx was alive. In 1875, Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, Marx's principal spokesmen in Germany, had muted the old man's more radical ideas in order to create a unified German socialist party at Gotha—but to Marx's fury, the new party's program was so reformist that he and Engels seriously thought of denouncing it and had to be persuaded to limit themselves to criticizing it intramurally. Indeed, Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* was not published until a decade after his death and only at Engels's insistence. Thus not even German workers, in whose political activities Marx took a strong interest, formed a Marxist party during his lifetime. Yet within a decade of his death, his works were widely translated and carefully studied, and in many parts of the Western world they had come to be viewed reverentially as an indispensable guide to creating a socialist society. In time, social democratic parties that expressly adhered to Marxism were formed, or were in the process

of formation, in many European countries, among them Germany, Russia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden.

## THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

As these parties emerged, a strong sentiment developed to link them together in another International, with conferences, congresses, and a secretariat to coordinate their international relations. Although international labor congresses of one kind or another had been held since the demise of the First International in 1872—mainly to coordinate a joint struggle for the eight-hour day—a Marxist-oriented Second International did not come into being until 1889. In that year two congresses were called in Paris on the centenary of Bastille Day, both of which were intent on creating a new International. One congress, overwhelmingly French, met at a hall in the Rue Lancry, under the auspices of a socialist tendency known as the Possibilists, inspired by Paul Brousse. Brousse, a former anarchist whose enthusiastic embrace of "propaganda by the deed" had made him a zealous supporter of terrorism, became in the 1870s a mild-mannered, even respectable advocate of municipal socialism, based on reforms and the pursuit of what was "possible"—hence the name that was given to his movement.

The other congress convened within walking distance of the first, at a hall in the Rue Pétrelle. Although its participants were fewer in number, they were far more international in composition: they included men and women who were to become the major figures in international Marxism, such as Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Eduard Bernstein (who had not yet become a Revisionist), Carl Legien (the head of the German Free Unions), and Clara Zetkin, from Germany; Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, Charles Longuet, and Edouard Vaillant, from France; William Morris, from Britain; George Plekhanov, the "father" of Russian Marxism; and Victor Adler, whose formative role in Austrian social democracy was comparable to Bebel's in Germany. It was from this gathering that the so-called Second International, greatly influenced by the Marxism of these delegates, was formed, with branches—consisting mainly of political parties—in all major countries where workers' parties were legal.

What partly induced the Second International to constitute itself as a formal organization was an appeal from the American labor movement to endorse a new proletarian "holiday," to be commemorated on May 1, 1890, with the object of gaining the eight-hour working day. The Americans had called upon workers all over the world to simultaneously go on strike on behalf of the demand—and in the process to demonstrate proletarian



strength, international solidarity, and militancy. (As we shall see, however, the "May Day" resolution that the congress passed was not exactly the one that its American proponents had advocated.) Thereafter the annual congresses that the International held passed resolutions not only for an eight-hour working day and the improvement of living conditions for the proletariat, but also for far more radical demands, such as the substitution of citizens' militias for regular armies. It also made commitments to fight for universal suffrage and engage in parliamentary activity, resolutions that were markedly distinct from the demands of anarchists and syndicalists. Finally, at its Zurich Congress of 1893, the International formally adopted Marxism as its doctrine of choice, in the presence of a beaming Engels, who thus lived to see his name, together with Marx's, enshrined as co-founders of the largest socialist movement in history, indeed one that, in the decades following his own death two years later, would achieve an influence comparable to that of a world religion.

It says something about the political mood of the time, however, that the congress in the Rue Pétrelle was also very ecumenical. The International's founding members included not only most of the world's leading Marxists but also Peter Lavrov, a leading Russian Populist; Domela Nieuwenhuis, who was soon to become the most outstanding anarchist in the Netherlands; and Gustav Landauer, one of Germany's most celebrated libertarian socialists. To the chagrin of the German social democrats, the congress also had a complement of highly demonstrative individualistic anarchists. Even after the International officially adopted Marxism in 1893, anarchists—principally the sizable number of French syndicalists with an expressly anarchist orientation—doggedly continued to reappear at International congresses. Only in 1896, at a stormy meeting of the congress in London, where the two opposing camps from the old First International resurfaced, were all anarchists expelled, whereupon they abandoned any attempt to re-enter the International and turned variously to terrorism and to syndicalism as their strategies of choice.

## BACKGROUND TO COMPROMISE

As early as the founding meeting in the Rue Pétrelle, the Germans began to establish organizational and programmatic hegemony over the new International. Indeed, the sweep of Marxism over the world actually had its beginnings in Germany, where its popularity clearly stemmed from the failure of the German ruling classes to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the industrial proletariat. Whatever power and appropriateness Marx's ideas may have had on their own for mobilizing the industrial working class, they were given an enormous impetus by Bismarck's manic fear of socialism and his attempt to

suppress it. As it turned out, the spread of socialist ideas had no better friend than the "Iron Chancellor," whose unrelenting efforts to efface their influence over a span of twelve years—from 1878 to 1890—ultimately did more to invigorate the revolutionary tone of social democracy than its own most eloquent agitators and organizers.

Ironically, once the factory system took hold in central Europe, Germany might well have followed a social trajectory comparable to that of Britain, whose nobility and bourgeoisie had shrewdly coopted the industrial proletariat, eventually absorbing it into the emerging capitalist social order. In principle there was no reason why this could not also happen in Germany. The German workers were not particularly militant, let alone revolutionary like the French; nor did they suffer as bitterly as did British workers during the transition to an industrial economy. In the decades following the suppression of the Paris Commune, when the German industrial revolution got fully under way, Europe enjoyed a considerable degree of social peace. In fact, the passivity of the German workers can be traced to the revolutionary years of 1848-49, when German craftsmen—the working class of that day—allowed themselves, for the most part, to be led by middle-class liberals in their assault upon the despotic monarchies and duchies of central Europe. In contrast to their French brethren, the Germans produced no major independent working-class movement of their own, still less an uprising comparable to the June insurrection in Paris. Thus, German workers remained fairly tame well into the latter half of the nineteenth century; indeed, such working-class organizations that they formed were mainly educational and welfare associations, many of them influenced by Catholic and Protestant clerics.

The writings of socialists like Moses Hess, Wilhelm Weitling, and Karl Grün had far more influence among German exiles and journeymen abroad than they did at home, playing only a minor role among craftsmen in the German uprisings of 1848 and 1849. Radical artisanal organizations such as the *Verbrüderung* (literally, "fraternization") did surface during the revolution, particularly in Berlin and Leipzig, but most German workers followed in the tow of the liberals—notably, academics, professionals, and bureaucrats who had been recruited from the existing parliaments of various German sovereignties to form a short-lived pan-German national legislature. Meeting in Frankfurt, this Assembly, obsessed with legalisms and constitutional niceties, ineffectually squandered its opportunity to create a modern unified nation out of the innumerable quasi-feudal states, duchies, free cities, and bishoprics of the German-speaking world outside of Austria. In the end, the Assembly tried to bestow the role of all-German constitutional monarch on Frederick William IV of Prussia, who soon brushed the offer aside, after which the Assembly disappeared in the flood of reaction that followed the revolutions of the period.

The failure of the 1848-49 revolutions in the various German-speaking



states, particularly in Prussia and Austria, left open the problem of forming a united German nation. Unification, when it did occur, was ultimately brought about not from below, by liberals and socialists, but from above, by the Prussian monarchy, under the stern guidance of Otto von Bismarck and his cohort of semifeudal reactionary militarists, the Junker landowners from east of the Elbe River. Indeed, for more than a quarter of a century, from 1862 to 1890, Bismarck presided over German affairs in a career that was little less than cyclonic. Having been elevated to the position of Prussian prime minister in 1862, he soon turned his well-trained Prussian armies on Austria in 1866, victoriously removing Vienna from the race for German hegemony and in the same year absorbed Hanover, Schleswig, and Holstein into the Prussian creation known as the North German Confederation. These annexations were followed, between 1868 and 1871, by the absorption of major southern German sovereignties such as Saxony, Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg and, after the Franco-Prussian War, Alsace and Lorraine. In less than two decades, Bismarck had created a powerful German Empire, or Reich, under the Prussian emperor (or Kaiser) Wilhelm I, while he himself became its first chancellor in 1871. That it was Bismarck and the militaristic and authoritarian Prussian Junkers who established and ruled the Reich—rather than the liberal democrats, who were hapless spectators to the militaristic unification—was tragic not only for Germany but for Europe as a whole.

In the same year that Bismarck embarked on his career, a determined workers' movement finally began to emerge in Germany, soon to be led by a brilliant young Jewish lawyer, Ferdinand Lassalle. Lassalle, invited to address a German artisans' organization in Berlin on April 12, 1862, delivered a peroration, later published as the "Workers' Program," that was partly rooted in Marx's ideas and that drew its inspiration from the *Communist Manifesto*. Not only had Lassalle read Marx's available writings, he had known Marx fairly well from the 1840s onward. Later, as the young lawyer began to gain considerable prestige among the German workers, he visited Marx in London, and the two men maintained an ongoing correspondence. To all appearances, in fact, Lassalle seemed to regard Marx as his theoretical mentor and tried to find German publishers for his work.

Moreover, Lassalle's career as a labor leader was truly meteoric. In the mere two years that passed between his emergence as a workers' leader and his death in a duel over a love affair in 1864, his activities gained him a legendary status in the history of social democracy. During that short time span he toured Germany, stirring up the latent sentiment for a working-class party that would function independently of the liberals in parliamentary politics. Idolized by thousands of workers, his fervent, often theatrical oratory, his organizational talents (which he exercised quite high-handedly), and his manifesto directly inspired thousands of German workers to create their own organizations and,

under his guidance, to gather at an ad hoc workers' congress in Frankfurt in May 1863, where they agreed to establish the General German Workers Association (*Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein*, or ADAV). Thus, within a single year, Lassalle found himself at the head of the largest—and for a brief time, the only—working-class party in Germany, as a result of which he left a profound imprint upon the German workers' movement for decades after his death.

But his close personal ties to Marx notwithstanding, Lassalle was not in fact a Marxist. Indeed, he and Marx embodied two distinct, even opposing tendencies in the German working-class movements. Where Marx was a revolutionary and a socialist, Lassalle was basically a reformist, parliamentarian, and cooperativist. These differences in political orientation were rooted in profound differences in philosophy and social theory. Where Marx's large body of economic writings were nothing if not social, Lassalle's sparse economic theories were rooted far more in pseudo-biological facts—especially in Malthus's theories of population. Lassalle more or less believed that population numbers directly influenced the availability of the means of subsistence, and he agreed with Ricardo's so-called "iron law of wages," according to which workers' wages fluctuated around the barest subsistence level necessary to sustain life. If population increased more rapidly than food supply, an overabundance of workers available for exploitation would ensue and wages would decline. This wage decline would then reduce the number of available workers, causing a renewed demand for labor that would increase wages once again. Although these oscillations would recur indefinitely, workers' wages would remain as low as possible, altered only by changes in the availability of labor. To Marx, this "iron law of wages" was entirely specious; he attributed the decline in working-class living standards primarily to capitalist competition and the capitalist imperative to increase profits. The "iron law" served only to conceal the real role of capitalist social relations by subsuming them to pseudo-biological factors.

The main source of conflicting tendencies that would persist in German social democracy for decades, however, was the profound political differences that existed between the two men. According to Lassalle, the only way that workers could avoid the impact of the "iron law of wages" was to gain control of the state for themselves and establish a government that would foster producers' cooperatives under workers' control. Such a state would provide capital and credit to a network of producers' and consumers' cooperatives, which hopefully would eventually replace the capitalist economy.

In fairness, it should be noted that Lassalle contrasted his state-subsidized cooperatives to voluntary private attempts to establish them. Voluntary endeavors, he believed, were too limited to produce more than isolated enterprises, with little effect upon capitalism as a whole. He even regarded trade



unions as too limited in scope to provide a basis for recreating society along cooperative lines. By contrast, Marx held that unions were important for attaining better working conditions and as living schools for instilling class consciousness in the proletariat. As for Lassalle's emphasis on state-subsidized producers' cooperatives, Marx saw it as a naive archaism redolent of Louis Blanc's social workshops.

Nor did Marx agree with Lassalle's expectation that the working class could use the state on its own behalf. As we have seen, Marx viewed the state as a historical phenomenon rooted in class rule and, his own statist socialism notwithstanding, he generally rejected the notion that the bourgeois state apparatus could be an instrument for any class but the bourgeoisie. Lassalle, by contrast, contended that the state could be used by workers to enhance their interests and even transform society along cooperativist lines. This belief stemmed from his reverential, even quasi-mystical view of the state, largely rooted in the tradition of German philosophical idealism, as a national expression of the German Volk and hence as a neutral force that could serve the interest of the people as well as their rulers. In the context of conflicting class interests, Lassalle's acceptance of the state served to foster reformist tendencies within the German labor movement, while his tendency to think in terms of a German Volksgeist was essentially reactionary in its implications.

Moreover, Lassalle shared Bismarck's view that German national unification should be guided by Prussia. Marx, who earnestly believed in the need for German national unification, deeply distrusted the Iron Chancellor's attempts to achieve national hegemony, especially with the backing of Prussian militarists. Indeed, Lassalle so detested the liberals, who represented the interests of capitalism, that he came perilously close to making common cause with the Prussian Junkers who, for their own reasons, affected to be antibourgeois, with the result that Lassalle's behavior was often highly unprincipled and included private negotiations with Bismarck against German liberals.

How would the workers create a state that would foster worker-controlled cooperatives? Lassalle's strategy, as we have seen, was mainly electoral and reformist. Lassalleans contended that workers should establish their own party and fight above all for universal adult male suffrage, in order be able to elect their own candidates to the legislative bodies of the existing state. This essentially reformist parliamentary strategy contrasted dramatically with Marx's revolutionary view that the workers had to take power, if necessary by insurrection, smash the old state machinery, and replace it with a new worker-controlled state apparatus. According to Marx, such a workers' state would exist only long enough to subdue bourgeois opposition, nationalize property, and plan production to meet human needs, after which it would

fade away for want of any other function to perform. To use the famous aphorism of the time: the administration of men would be replaced by the administration of things. Apart from the exceptions Marx made regarding the United States, England, and perhaps Holland, there is no reason to believe that he gave up on these strategic goals, the many ambiguities in his writings notwithstanding.

Lassalle's ADAV did not long remain the only or even the principal workers' party in Germany. On May 17, 1863, a hundred and ten delegates from workers' educational associations in forty-five cities throughout Germany convened at Frankfurt to form the Union of German Workers' Leagues (*Verband Deutscher Arbeitervereine*, or VDAV) with a view toward coordinating their efforts along political lines. By contrast to the Lassallean ADAV, which was highly centralized and managed, as many workers complained, along dictatorial lines, the *Verband* was more of a federation than a party, allowing its constituent groups to enjoy considerable local autonomy. In fact VDAV groups were not necessarily socialist and, if they so wished, were free to ally themselves politically with progressive bourgeois parties.

Initially, the *Verband's* goals were diffuse. But the socialists within the VDAV steadily radicalized its goals, and at the two congresses that followed its founding (1867 and 1868), it tightened its structure, began to function as a political party, and very significantly, joined the First International, which meant that the *Verband* was expected to demand social ownership of the means of production. As its leader, the *Verband* elected a young wood-turner from Leipzig, the twenty-seven-year-old August Bebel, who would go on to become the most dynamic and influential figure in German socialism after Lassalle died.

In fact, Bebel had been won over to Marxism by Wilhelm Liebknecht, and between them the two men were to do for German socialism what Guesde did to foster Marxism in France. Following in Marx's footsteps, the *Verband*, in contrast to the ADAV, rejected state aid in any form as well as the formation of cooperatives. Instead the organization called for the formation of trade unions, which placed it squarely in the emerging tendency of proletarian socialism, rather than artisanal socialism. In 1869 at Eisenach, the *Verband* merged with the Saxon People's Party, originally a populist party composed predominantly of workers, to form an explicitly workers' socialist party, the Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*, or SDAP).

Owing to Bebel's and Liebknecht's convictions, the SDAP was undoubtedly the first working-class organization in Germany to be led by avowed Marxists, although its program still resembled the relatively ecumenical manifestos that Marx had written for the First International rather than the expressly revolutionary views he had been advancing in the pamphlets and books published under his own imprimatur. But if the SDAP was not formally Marxist,



it was the first German party, since the old Communist League, with which Marx and Engels had a direct association and on which they exercised a major influence.

The relationship between the SDAP and the ADAV was anything but cordial. So bitter was the rivalry between the two workers' parties and so acrimonious the relations between their leaders that any prospect of collaboration seemed completely foreclosed. It was not only its more radical positions—its strong internationalism and its bitter hostility to the Prussian government—that distinguished the SDAP from the reformistic ADAV. In 1870, for example, from his seat in the Reichstag of the North German Confederation, Liebknecht abstained from voting for war credits to support the Franco-Prussian War. (His reason for abstaining was that he refused to abet the imperialism of Louis Napoleon as well as Bismarck, which earned him two years of imprisonment for high treason.) Indeed, once the treaty terms were announced, he adamantly opposed the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. By contrast, the ADAV accommodatingly went along with Bismarck and gave the war its full support—an act that the SDAP regarded as a betrayal of proletarian internationalism.

The Paris Commune, however, unnerved the Iron Chancellor, who now began to denounce and harass all socialist organizations in Germany. Both socialist parties were confronted by a state that meant to suppress them if it could, and it was only by overcoming their bitter rivalry and joining forces that they could hope to mount an effective resistance to the increasingly repressive imperial regime. Between May 22 and 27, 1875, in the Thuringian town of Gotha, the ADAV (or Lassalleans, as they were generally known) and the SDAP (Bebel and Liebknecht's Eisenachers) finally convened to form a united Social Democratic Party of Germany, initially under the name of Socialist Workers' Party (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, or SAPD). Attended by 130 delegates, this Gotha Congress represented 25,000 members, of whom sixty percent were Lassalleans and the remainder Eisenachers.

What probably made possible the establishment of the SAPD was the enormous ideological concessions that the Eisenachers (led by Liebknecht in the negotiations) made to the Lassalleans. For the Eisenachers, the program of the new party—known as the Gotha Program—marked a definite retreat for the Eisenachers. As Gary P. Steenson tells it:

Judged by its program, the new party was a victory for the ADAV, and this was certainly the evaluation of Marx and Engels, who were sitting in England. In fact, the two "old ones," as they were called in party circles, had tried to forestall the program by sending severe criticisms of the draft to Bebel, Liebknecht, Bracke, and others in the SDAP with whom they had some influence. Ever jealous of their old nemesis Lassalle, and of what they considered their special relationship with the German workers' movement,

Marx and Engels denounced the new program as confused, state-socialistic, and too great a concession for the unity even they considered necessary. Although Marx's criticism is now more famous . . . , Engels too sent detailed commentary to Bebel and Liebknecht. Attacking the notion of "one reactionary mass," the iron law of wages (with its implicit anti-trade unionism), the concept of a free people's state, and many other aspects of the program, Engels predicted that unity on this basis would not last a year.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, it was hardly jealousy that induced Marx and Engels to reject the new program. The Gotha Program, which Marx trenchantly critiqued in a lengthy letter to a few of his leading supporters, contained major formulations that were so reformist, as we have seen, that he and Engels seriously considered publicly dissociating themselves from the document. Aside from relatively minor errors, Marx found statements that were opaque at best and intolerable at worst. The program committed the members of the new party to "strive" for their "emancipation . . . within the framework of the present-day national state"—a demand that Marx regarded as totally inconsistent with the worldwide unity of the working class. He might have added that the program's emphasis on the "present-day" bourgeois state as the arena of working-class "emancipation" explicitly acknowledged the legitimacy of the existing state as a decisive realm of struggle and implicitly rejected the need for revolution. Additionally, the program contained a reference to a "free state," as though the state were ever anything but an instrument of class rule (even by the working class), whose ultimate abolition would necessarily follow from the abolition of class society. Finally, to cite its most compromising features, the program described the "solution of the social question" as "the establishment of producers' cooperatives with state aid under the democratic control of the working people," a completely Lassalleian, indeed a Blanc-esque assertion of an artisanal socialism, which allowed that the state could be a source of cooperative networks under "democratic" control.

Marx's critique of the program was withering; but more important, the few pages that constitute the brilliant *Critique of the Gotha Program* form a landmark document in the theoretical underpinnings of Marxian communism.<sup>2</sup> Little did Marx know, ironically, that some of the most objectionable formulations in the Gotha Program had been written by Liebknecht to please the Lassalleans, but the Eisenachers generally sloughed off Marx's criticism with the prediction that they would not seriously affect the workings and policies of the new party.

Engels's prediction that the unified party would not last the year proved wrong. Liebknecht and Bebel assured the "old ones" that time would ultimately bring the new party over to a Marxist point of view, particularly in view of the more democratic organization that the SAPD had by comparison with the



ADAV. Whether Marx's views could have prevailed over Lassalle's is hard to judge: in the SAPD (and in the later SPD, as the party finally came to be known in 1891), the Lassallean approach reflected in the Gotha Program persisted—certainly in the party's behavior if not its program, albeit not only because of Lassalle's legacy.

In the year following the founding congress, Marx's early supporters in the SAPD never decisively confronted the reformist outlook that dominated the program, partly because the antisocialist law of 1878, initiated by Bismarck, made party unity at all costs a vital necessity. In effect, for the social democrats, the antisocialist law was a mixed blessing: although it exposed them to over a decade of repression, it also kept them from confronting the latent conflict that simmered within their party from the day of its founding.

## REFORM OR REVOLUTION

The political edifice of the new Reich was designed to prevent an independent working class or any serious democratic movement from gaining substantial power in Germany. But the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Europe was a particularly balmy era of general social and political reform, and neither the German Kaiser nor Bismarck wanted the Reich to be viewed as a tsarist-style tyranny or an archaic despotism. Hence, with the establishment of the empire in 1871, the Prussian-run government gave the newly united German Reich the superficial trappings of a constitutional monarchy.

For the Reich as a whole, Bismarck established a lower legislative house, the Reichstag, based on universal adult male suffrage. In theory, this pan-German body, with deputies from 397 electoral districts, was supposed to represent the will of all male citizens, regardless of property or status—although subject, to be sure, to the paternal oversight of the monarch. In practice, however, the Reichstag was virtually powerless, a fig leaf for autocracy, as the social democrats called it. Except for military and foreign policy questions, which fell entirely within the purview of the chancellor and the monarch, the Reichstag was free to debate all political issues. But it could not pass laws on its own initiative, and the main authority it had was confined to accepting or rejecting the national budget—which, of course, was drawn up entirely by the chancellor and his ministers. Even in this capacity, moreover, the Reichstag's wishes could simply be ignored by the Kaiser, who retained the authority to handle all military expenditures at his own discretion.

The real power in the empire was shared among the Bundesrat (Federal Council), an upper house composed entirely of ministers from the formerly independent German states; the chancellor, who was appointed by the Kaiser

and was answerable exclusively to him rather than to any legislative body; the ubiquitous and thoroughly domesticated bureaucracy; the Prussian army, the strongest and the most socially entrenched military machine in Europe; and the Kaiser himself who, when he so chose, could exercise complete personal power over the government. With such a structure and so-called constitution, the empire could hardly be mistaken for even the most limited of constitutional monarchies. Its constitution, far from emanating from the people, was in fact a dispensation of the monarchy. Using the authority of the pliant Bundesrat, the Kaiser could disband the Reichstag at his will, appoint or remove the chancellor, and ultimately dictate whatever policy he chose to make, including decisions on war and peace, whether the Reichstag approved or not.

The existence of the Bundesrat preserved the arguable image of the Bismarckian empire as a federation of states, each with its own legislative diet. The federation was not entirely mythical—these old states did retain some powers of their own, resting partly on law and partly on tradition. Some states, particularly in southern Germany, had a relatively tolerant political atmosphere and occasionally allowed socialists to gain seats in the state legislature. In the Reichstag, the now-united SAPD began to get large numbers of votes in national elections, increasing from 352,000 in 1874 to 493,000 in 1877, while its Reichstag deputies increased from nine to twelve. Moreover, local socialist newspapers proliferated with unnerving rapidity, from twenty-three in 1876 to forty-one only a year later. Shortly after the formation of the SAPD in 1875, the Lassalleans and Eisenachers combined their two newspapers to establish *Vorwärts* (Forward), which became the party's official national organ.

In 1878 the Iron Chancellor finally succeeded in making the SAPD illegal. Ever fearful of a class war in Germany, Bismarck was eager to nip the growing party in the bud; indeed, as he put it in his own words, "the Social Democrats produced, more than foreign countries, a danger for war for monarchy and state, and . . . they should be viewed by the government in terms of a military and power problem, not a legal problem."<sup>3</sup> But before he could outlaw the social democrats, Bismarck needed an excuse, and in 1878 he found just such a pretext when two unsuccessful attempts were made to assassinate the Kaiser, each within a month of the other. Although the assassins were not socialists, on October 21, 1878, having generated a furious "red scare," Bismarck induced the imperial Reichstag to pass the antisocialist law, or "Law Against the Publicly Dangerous Endeavors of Social Democracy," which empowered local police authorities in German states to dissolve all organizations, meetings, periodicals, public activities, and festive events that were even slightly tinted with socialist colors. Taverns that were suspected of being frequented by socialist workers could be and were closed down. The property and assets of suppressed organizations and periodicals were freely confiscated, and ordinary participants in any of the proscribed activities were subject to fines of 500 marks or three



months' imprisonment. Leaders or initiators of these activities, in turn, could be jailed for as long as a year, obliging many of them, including ordinary workers, to take flight to Switzerland, England, and the United States.

The same prohibitions against overtly political socialist organizations were extended to all other working-class associations that could be regarded as sympathetic to the socialists, including the Free Unions, which were generally socialistic. Even nonpolitical associations were prohibited, such as cultural, calisthenic, and literary groups. The prohibition was so patently discriminatory against the working classes that it infuriated many workers who were neither members of the SAPD nor even necessarily sympathetic to it. Oddly, however, the antisocialist laws, harsh as they were for their day, did not deprive the SAPD of its voice within the chambers of the Reichstag. Socialists could run for office, provided they presented themselves to the electorate as individual candidates rather than as representatives of the banned party, and the party itself, for a time, was able to function as a vote-getting machine by reconstituting many of its national, regional, and municipal committees as mere electoral organizations. The party's national *Vorstand* or Executive Committee continued to exist, for example, by calling itself the electoral commission of the Hamburg area. Many party organizations of lesser importance followed suit—at least until Bismarck finally hounded them out of the public arena and drove them underground.

Thus, while the SAPD was forbidden to have headquarters, hold meetings, or own an official press, its candidates and spokespersons could wage individual electoral campaigns and reach a wide public through printing establishments that seemed to be privately owned but that were actually owned or controlled by party members and party sympathizers. Significantly, electoral campaigns became one of the main—if not the leading—means by which the party could maintain any kind of public existence, however surreptitiously, which greatly pushed it toward parliamentarism, despite the fact that its revolutionary rhetoric was heightened in tone and form by the overtly repressive behavior of the bourgeois state.

Although the antisocialist laws were applied with varying degrees of intensity over the twelve years of their existence, the persecution suffered by social democrats was nevertheless very real and costly. The government tried and/or imprisoned all the party's leaders it could find—more than 1,500 people were arrested in all, some of whom served lengthy sentences. By mid-1879, it had closed down 414 periodicals for their known or suspected socialist sympathies, obliging the party press to move to Switzerland, and in its efforts to build an underground network within Germany, the party faced continual losses in leaders and resources. Even more effective were the government's assaults upon the Free Unions, which necessarily had to function more openly than the party in order to reach nonsocialist as well as socialist workers, a task that made

them very vulnerable to government repression, with a resulting, even precipitous, drop in their numbers.

Yet even as Bismarck was trying to extirpate the SAPD, he was also attempting, between 1881 and 1884, to buy off the working class by establishing state-run social insurance programs, covering health, old age, and accidents. Although many Lassalleans in the party's Reichstag delegates were inclined to vote in favor of these bills, presumably in order to help the lot of the workers and gain their votes, the left within the party saw these reforms as an attempt by the Chancellor to lure the workers' sympathies away from socialism and toward the Reich. After internal disputes, the great majority of social democratic deputies, as a matter of principle, finally did vote against the Chancellor's reforms and refused to enter into complicity with a capitalist, indeed reactionary state that was trying to crush an avowedly anticapitalist workers' party.

In time, of course, the antisocialist law proved to be a boomerang. Its obvious class bias only served to increase socialist influence among a broad spectrum of workers, many of whom knew very little about socialism, and to cement the SAPD's ties with nonparty labor organizations, which were often equally uninformed about socialist ideas but in time became very influential in party affairs. Thus in the Reichstag elections of 1884, after six years of repression, the socialists won more than half a million votes, and in 1890, shortly before the antisocialist law was permitted to lapse, their electoral tally soared to a stunning 1.4 million, larger than any other Reichstag party and ten percent of the electorate. Bismarck, in effect, by trying to suppress the socialists, created a growing and angry constituency for them among the general voting public as well as in radical organizations, which in time would flood the party and mobilize constituencies for candidates who were hardly committed to the socialist principles that its leaders avowed.

Finally, in 1890, Bismarck was obliged to resign his position—not least because of temperamental differences with the new, headstrong young Kaiser, Wilhelm II, who was eager to rid himself of the arrogant and patronizing Chancellor. Nor was the new Kaiser eager to antagonize a large number of his subjects who were voting for, if not joining, a party and a union movement that the government had banned. Accordingly, in the same year that Bismarck left office, Wilhelm lifted the ban and restored the party's legal status. In the long run, the antisocialist law, far from weakening social democracy, gave it an aura of heroic glamour, and a tradition of having suffered persecution that made it an object of reverence to its members and extended its influence enormously not only in Germany but also abroad.

Moreover, even as the party attracted many ordinary Germans—middle class as well as proletarian—who were more sympathetic to its plight and to its call for reforms than to its core social ideas, the antisocialist law, by revealing the



class nature of the German state, also increased the influence of the more revolutionary tendencies in the party, namely the Marxists. By 1890 many German social democratic workers not only regarded the state as an undisguised enemy but had veered further to the left because of continual government harassment of their trade unions. Thus, the antisocialist law served to give the party a revolutionary veneer that, unknown to its more radical leaders and worker militants, concealed the presence of many members and electoral supporters who were basically reformist in their ideas and behavior. This tension between reformist behavior and radical veneer, which had existed in the party since the adoption of the Gotha Program, was the source of the seemingly inexplicable ambiguities and contradictory behavior of the party up to the outbreak of the First World War.

In the meantime, at its 1891 Congress in Erfurt, in Thuringia, the party changed its name for the last time, to the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD), as well as its program. The passages in the Gotha Program to which Marx and Engels had so strongly objected were discarded, and an entirely new document, pithy and entirely committed to Marx's ideas, was adopted. Framed by Karl Kautsky, with whom Engels had personally collaborated in preparing Marx's posthumous *Theories of Surplus Value*, it freely borrowed its analysis and phraseology from *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, often with little modification of Marx's sweeping prose style.

The opening passages of the Erfurt Program virtually repeat, in the same ringing language, Marx's lines on capitalist accumulation (see Chapter 32) that close with the demand, "The expropriators are expropriated."

Ever greater grows the number of proletarians, ever more enormous the army of surplus workers, ever sharper the opposition between exploiters and exploited, ever bitterer the class war between bourgeoisie and proletariat, which divides modern society into two hostile camps and is the common characteristic of all industrial countries.<sup>4</sup>

The language is strident and combative. There is no mention of Lassalleian cooperatives or state support, still less any notion that the state can stand above society as a neutral arbiter of social differences. In its historical demands, the program is sweepingly revolutionary:

Only the transformation of capitalistic private ownership of the means of production—the soil, mines, raw materials, tools, machines, and means of transport—into social ownership and the transformation of production of goods for sale into socialistic production managed for and through society, can bring it about that the great industry and the steadily growing

productive capacity of social labor shall for the hitherto exploited classes be changed from a source of misery and oppression to a source of the highest welfare and of all-around harmonious perfection.<sup>5</sup>

This radical tone was maintained in the party's programmatic literature and in party pronouncements by Liebknecht (albeit somewhat equivocally) up to his death in 1900 and by Bebel who, at the turn of the century, became the real leader of the party's organization. Kausky, as the party's principal theoretician (and editor of its main theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit*, or *New Time*), played the role of the guardian of Marxist orthodoxy up to the First World War. All three of these men, to be sure, repeatedly vacillated in their political views and, as we will see, engineered reformist compromises with the existing social order. Nonetheless, for several decades they advanced a stirring Marxian rhetoric, of a kind that did not vary greatly from the speech that Bebel gave before the Reichstag shortly after the fall of the Paris Commune:

You should be firmly convinced that the whole European proletariat and everyone else who has still within him a feeling for freedom and independence looks to Paris. And though Paris is suppressed at the moment, I would like to remind you that the battle in Paris is merely a small skirmish of outposts, that the decisive events are still to come, and that within a few decades the battle cry of the Paris proletariat—"War on the palaces, peace for the huts, down with misery and idleness"—will be the battle cry of the whole European proletariat.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of rhetoric had persisted throughout the "outlaw period," and even Eduard Bernstein, who later appealed for a reformist orientation within the party, initially echoed Bebel's words, opposing any tendency within the SPD to accommodate itself to the status quo.

But the party's enormous successes at the polls, even during the period of its illegality, suggested that an underlying conservatism still existed among large sectors of the party and especially the trade union membership. Bebel's words had been appropriately heroic for the 1870s and the "outlaw period." But once the party became a fully legal organization with an immense following (often poorly educated in socialist ideas) and possessed of considerable material holdings, as befitted a major parliamentary organization, the behavior of the party became less confrontational and more liberal. During the 1890s in southern Germany, where Bismarck's repressive measures had been less severe, social democratic deputies to the state legislatures were already making opportunistic compromises with their liberal colleagues and trying to tone down the revolutionary rhetoric of the national party leaders.

Among the social democratic Reichstag deputies, too, an explicit right wing



began to appear, which was willing to accede to Bismarckian policies when they seemed to benefit its working-class electorate, even during conditions of illegality—as we have seen, when Bismarck was making his social insurance reforms. It surfaced even more markedly, during the mid-1880s, over the question of government subsidies for the ship-building industry. Where the Left opposed the subsidies as an attempt to further German imperialism by extending shipping routes to colonial countries, especially Africa, the new right-wing social democratic deputies viewed them as a source of jobs for German workers, arguing for their support within the parliamentary caucus. By the 1890s, the party was becoming excessively successful, by promoting cosmetic reforms entirely within the framework of the Reich—reforms that properly should have been the concerns mainly of liberals and progressives. It is fair to say that by championing the material well-being of its working-class voters without challenging the social order, the Social Democratic Party in Germany was becoming more democratic than socialist and more reformist than revolutionary.

This rightward shift—including an attempt by moderate social democratic deputies to muzzle the radical rhetoric of one of the party's newspapers, the *Sozialdemokrat*—can be expected to emerge in any ostensibly revolutionary movement whose demands for reform coincide with those of liberals on specific issues. With the SPD, this overlapping of interests was unavoidable, given the party's huge and often socially mixed constituency. But the party could also have chosen to use reformist issues to heighten the importance of its revolutionary socialist vision. As early as 1850, in their "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," Marx and Engels had suggested that a revolutionary working-class party like the League should advance reformist demands by continually escalating them into revolutionary ones. Accordingly, they wrote that if the bourgeois democrats wanted the state to regulate aspects of the economy, the League should demand its outright nationalization; if the bourgeois democrats called upon the state to purchase railroads, the League should demand that the state confiscate the railroads outright. The League, they argued, "must drive the proposals of the democrats, who in any case will not act in a revolutionary but reformist manner, to the extreme and transform them into direct attacks upon private property."<sup>7</sup>

This policy of escalating reformist demands into increasingly revolutionary ones was completely lost on the new officialdom that the SPD was spawning in the Reichstag and the state legislatures. A pragmatic political leadership, expressly disdainful of theory and principles, it preferred to consider the merits of reforms in their own right, often precisely as the government presented them. Instead of challenging their authenticity or revealing their limitations—let alone expanding them into more radical demands—more and more social democratic deputies tended to vote yea or nay with little critical perspective.

Eventually, the contradictions between the party's rhetorical adherence to Marxism and its growing opportunistic pragmatism came out in the open in a theoretical debate, which raged furiously from about 1898 to 1904, between Eduard Bernstein's Revisionism and the upholders of the Erfurt Program's revolutionism. Bernstein had been an orthodox Marxist until the early 1890s, and up to his death in 1932, he insisted that he remained one and had never challenged the core social insights of Marx. During the twelve years of the antisocialist law he had spent in London, exiled by a prison sentence, he had lived almost reverentially in Engels's shadow. At the same time he had quietly been imbibing the gradualist doctrines of the British Fabians, a small number of prominent intellectuals who had rejected revolution as impractical, indeed as undesirable, because capitalism seemed to open immeasurable prospects for reform and ultimately a peaceful road to socialism.

Yet it would be naive to assume that Fabian doctrines alone turned Bernstein from a Marxian revolutionary into a social democratic reformist. The last quarter of the nineteenth century as a whole was a time of considerable social improvement. Far from fulfilling Marx's predictions in *Capital* that the capitalist economy would drive the working class to destitution and produce growing economic crises, workers in the 1890s visibly enjoyed a relatively high degree of economic prosperity. The period, if anything, was marked by considerable social stability and a strong belief in the certainty of unimpeded progress. Working within the existing state structure, it seemed, might be a far better strategy for attaining a socialist society than waging a costly, precarious, and bloody armed revolt. It was precisely this evolutionary strategy that Bernstein began to advance in a letter to the SPD in October 1898: instead of trying to make a revolution to attain a socialist society, socialists should work to make incremental gains that would lead to a slow and peaceful transition to socialism.

Bernstein, to be sure, was not the first German social democrat to challenge Marx's revolutionary doctrines. As early as 1891, in opposition to the adoption of the Erfurt Program, Georg von Vollmar of Munich had voiced the belief that socialism could be attained through a slow organic evolution of society, and like many Bavarian and other south German members (who had never surrendered this view), he urged the party to adopt reformist measures that were tabooed by orthodox Marxism. His arguments had fallen on deaf ears, especially in Prussia, which harbored the most left-wing theorists and workers in the party. Owing primarily to his distinguished position in the party and his more sophisticated critique of Marxism, Bernstein had managed to turn his Revisionist doctrines (as they were called) into a vocal and growing tendency, which, in fact, often gave a theoretical patina to practices that differed little from those of the pragmatists in the party and the unions and the leading trade unionists.

What is very significant about Bernstein's Revisionism, moreover, is that it



opened up a long-standing debate over reform versus revolution not only in German social democracy but among socialist parties abroad. All the party's big guns, such as Kautsky and Bebel, and especially its brilliant theorists such as Rosa Luxemburg, denounced Bernstein, and some even tried to drive him out the party itself. Bebel clearly recognized that Bernstein's views, which were first expressed at the Stuttgart Congress of the SPD in 1898, were by no means the aberration of a single man: they spoke to a wider segment of the party than his opponents' leaders were willing to acknowledge. Accordingly, with Bebel's aid, Bernstein remained in the party and even became a Reichstag deputy, revealing that changes were occurring not only in Bebel's mind but in those of leading theorists who still publicly professed to oppose Bernstein's views. Although the Revisionists always remained a minority at the party congresses up to the outbreak of the First World War, they had a much larger following than the votes they gained at SPD congresses would seem to indicate, and they even managed to attain a very important standing in world socialism.

This silent following included an important sector within the party—the trade union leadership, who were socialists in name only. In 1889, with the founding of the Second International, the union leadership had been infuriated by the call for a worldwide general strike on May 1. In order to avoid a work stoppage, they demanded that the German party be given the leeway to call its May Day meetings during an evening or on a weekend, rather than strike on May 1. Significantly, Bebel and his supporters in the party acceded to their wishes, thereby reducing the symbolic significance of the day from an expression of social protest to a tame, celebratory festival. Indeed, in later years it was union delegates to congresses of the Second International who turned the German social democratic delegation into a conservative force that generally opposed militant responses to major problems confronting the working class, including radical antiwar resolutions. Repeatedly, the union leadership played a major role in collusion with party moderates in bridling the social democratic youth movement, which supported the radicals in the party on democratic issues and against militarism.

Otherwise, the union leaders, for the most part, remained aloof from party debates on Revisionism—not because they opposed Bernstein but because of their indifference to theoretical issues. The intraparty debates between the Revisionists and the orthodox Marxists generally provided the trade unions with intellectual justification for their cautious behavior, if and when they needed theoretical support; reformist party candidates, in turn, drew upon these debates to gain ideological justification for their policies in Germany's various legislative bodies. By degrees, despite the majority votes that the orthodox Marxists gained against Bernstein at party congresses, it became evident that a chronic malaise afflicted European socialism—one that was to turn into an illness, fatal to social democracy, in 1914.

## THE GROWING ACCOMMODATION

The most serious portent of the conservative shift—one that challenged the capacity of social democracy to act as a revolutionary movement—did not occur in the realm of theory. Rather, it was the result of a stormy and innovative revolution, of a kind that Europe had not seen since the days of the Paris Commune.

In 1905, after the tsar's misbegotten war against Japan ended in defeat for Russia, the Russian working class rose in an uprising that sent tremors around the world. Although the Russian workers engaged in considerable street fighting in the cities, particularly in St. Petersburg and Moscow, their primary weapon in destabilizing Europe's most hated autocracy was the general strike—or "mass strike," as it was called by the Germans. In wielding this quintessentially syndicalist weapon, the workers demonstrated for all to see that they could completely paralyze the country's major industrial centers—and create a revolutionary situation unequalled by any upsurge for more than a generation.

No sooner did news of the 1905 Revolution come to light, than a furious debate opened within the German Social Democratic Party about the merits and demerits of general strikes—particularly those waged not merely for economic but above all for political ends—indeed, as a means for overthrowing capitalism. The most radical proponents of the "mass strike" were relatively young social democrats in the party and the Second International—Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht (Wilhelm's son), and Clara Zetkin, among others—as well as distinguished elders such as Franz Mehring and, more equivocally, Karl Kautsky.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 brought the SPD—indeed, the entire Second International—face to face with its revolutionary conscience and traditions. The "mass strike" dispute now replaced the Revisionism debate—or more precisely, gave it concrete meaning. Like Revisionism, the Revolution challenged the very image of the Social Democratic Party as a revolutionary force, by focusing attention on the increasing apathy of the German working class toward revolution. The issue of the "mass strike" was not simply a theoretical question among a few intellectually minded leftist leaders. Rather, it forced members of the unions and their leaders to reconsider the role that unions as such would play in overthrowing capitalism. Bluntly put: how would the unions respond if the party called a general strike to achieve political ends rather than merely economic goals?

Marx, as we have seen, had always regarded unions as mere schools for educating workers in socialist, especially Marxian politics. He invariably gave priority to working-class political parties as the more sophisticated and able organizations of the labor movement. Before the 1905 Revolution, Marxist



theorists in Germany could reasonably support this view without fear of contradiction, thereby focusing the party's attention on electoral contests and parliamentary acrobatics. Strikes for economic ends had been left to the unions to decide upon and finance, an emphasis that allowed bureaucrats in the Free Unions to occupy themselves with pragmatic problems of day-to-day organization and labor relations while they disdainfully let the theorists duel with each other over fine points of Marxian theory.

But in 1905 the problem of the general strike, by raising an issue that bore directly on the role of trade unions in revolutionary action, could not be ignored. It invaded the very recesses of the union bureaucracy by requiring that the role of unions in a revolutionary situation be defined. As Steenson observes, "Probably no other issue in the history of the German working-class movement prior to the outbreak of world war in 1914 had such a far-reaching impact on internal relationships [in the SPD] as did the mass-strike debate of 1905-1906."<sup>8</sup> Predictably, the union leaders categorically opposed the right of the SPD to commit them to any mass action that confronted the social order, let alone the mass strike. So touchy was the union leadership on this issue that a Free Trade Union Congress at Cologne in May 1905 not only denounced the use of the general strike but blatantly forbade the union press and locals even to discuss it.

For their part, the party radicals saw the mass strike not only as a revolutionary weapon in its own right but as a way to revive a combative, revolutionary spirit in an increasingly sedate and parliamentary party. In response to the trade unions, they published a defense of the general strike written by the Dutch socialist Henriette Roland-Holst, with a preface by Karl Kautsky, as well as their own literature, including Rosa Luxemburg's 1906 pamphlet *The Mass Strike*. Bebel, for his part, straddling the unions and the radicals, opposed the general strike as more than a purely pragmatic and reformistic tactic, but he allowed for its use under restricted circumstances—a formula that satisfied neither camp in the party.

Inasmuch as the general strike had been a weapon of choice among Bakuninist anarchists, who had resolved to use the measure as a revolutionary weapon at their Geneva Congress of 1873, and in France was the revolutionary strategy par excellence advocated by the syndicalist CGT, local SPD branches throughout Germany began to invite anarchists to their meetings, primarily to educate them on the subject. In fact, the idea of the mass strike was far more appealing to the rank-and-file members than it was to the union leaders. Thus even after the Russian Revolution of 1905 went down in defeat, the notion of mass strikes lived on vigorously at SPD meetings and conferences. "The debate thus launched was long and acrimonious," Steenson concludes, "and despite the best efforts of the party and trade-union leaders, the issue would continue to cause problems right up to 1914."<sup>9</sup>

The crude measures used by SPD and union leaders to dampen any radical, let alone revolutionary sentiments among their followers is little short of appalling. In 1906, to neutralize any support for the mass strike, Bebel, whose revolutionary ardor was dwindling as rapidly as he was aging, and Carl Legien, the social democratic chieftain of the Free Unions, conspired behind the backs of their respective memberships to draw up a secret agreement on the financial responsibility for strikes. Strikes that were called for political reasons were to be the financial responsibility of the party alone, while strikes for economic goals were to be funded by the unions. Inasmuch as general strikes were expected to be political in nature, they obviously fell within the purview of the SPD, and to add insult to injury, the agreement stipulated that political general strikes were to be firmly discouraged by the party's Central Committee.

In fact, under the guise of dividing up responsibility for general strikes, the unions by this agreement effectively annulled the ability of the party to wage general strikes of any duration longer than a week or so. Possessed of only a quarter of the dues-paying membership of the unions, the SPD had far fewer financial resources, and since the party was precluded from calling upon the well-funded unions for assistance, even a large-scale political strike of any length, still less a general strike, was now beyond its financial means. The agreement thus gave the union leaders, most of whom were bureaucratic moderates with political views far to the right of the party leaders, the means to exercise inordinate financial leverage on the party's strike activities. Understandably, the SPD radicals were concerned that the union leadership would now be more prone to negotiate with employers than to engage in strike actions of any kind, not to speak of a general strike even for economic ends.

As alarming as this agreement was to the radicals, a similar agreement, also worked out by Bebel, went even further in according power to the trade unions at the expense of the party. For years the union leadership had resented its secondary role to the party leadership in matters concerning the policies of the social democratic movement as a whole. With the aid of rising party pragmatists such as Friedrich Ebert, Bebel now negotiated an agreement with the union leaders that would give parity to the party's Executive Committee and the unions' General Commission in all matters of policy—a virtual abdication of the political leadership to institutions that were supposed to function merely as the "schools" for social democracy.

Introduced to the SPD's Mannheim Congress of 1906, the resolutions approving these agreements produced a furor in the party's Left, led by Luxemburg and Kautsky, who appropriately regarded them as outright betrayals of basic Marxist principles. In response, Bebel engaged in verbal acrobatics that outdid his most sublime feats of logical manipulation. Simultaneously damning and praising all parties to the dispute, the old man eventually relegated the general strike for use as a strictly defensive weapon,



despite its patently revolutionary role in Russia. And the fact that he managed to win the overwhelming majority of the delegates to his position (323 to 62) revealed how far the SPD as well as its most important living founder had moved to the right, clearly placing narrow organizational considerations above once-sacrosanct principles. Like it or not, the German Social Democratic Party had ceased to be a revolutionary organization and in fact was permeated by reformist, even conservative sentiments.

The Mannheim Congress was a decisive event: it provided official confirmation that the union leadership was now dominant in party affairs. As Peter Gay observes:

The labor leaders had good cause for celebration [at Mannheim]; their great victory gave them far more than equality: in effect, it meant the surrender of the party to the unions. It prepared the way for the ascendancy of party bureaucrats who were not "theorists" and who "could get along" with the union leaders. . . . In short, it set the stage for the failure of the party in 1914 and for its breakup during the war.<sup>10</sup>

Needless to say, the new agreements marked a *de facto* rupture with what remained of Marxism within the party. The General Commission of the Free Unions, expressing its satisfaction at the vanquishing of revolutionary politics within the party, commented:

It is to be hoped that the frequent ructions during the Party and the trade unions between 1905 and 1906 will have a lasting good effect in that the complete co-operation, which now exists, will never again be endangered by theorists and writers who attach a greater value to mere revolutionary slogans than to practical work inside the labor movement.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the party's preoccupation with parliamentarism was taking it ever farther away from anything Marx had envisioned. Instead of working to overthrow the bourgeois state, the SPD, with its intense focus on elections, had virtually become an engine for getting votes and increasing its Reichstag representation within the bourgeois state. Education along socialist lines was giving way to mobilization along pragmatic lines, with the result that the party devoted ever more of its attention to immediate, everyday reforms at the expense of fundamental change. The more artful the SPD became in these realms, the more its membership and electorate increased and, with the growth of new pragmatic and opportunistic adherents, the more it came to resemble a bureaucratic machine for acquiring power under capitalism rather than a revolutionary organization to eliminate it.

## THE "MASS PARTY"

By 1914, the German Social Democratic Party had around a million members, and its affairs were managed by more than 4,000 paid functionaries and 11,000 ordinary salaried employees. It supported innumerable periodicals—local, regional, and national—many of which were dailies, others weeklies, still others monthlies, with a collective circulation of a million and a half readers. The pleasures of being a social democrat are suggested by the multitude of different hobbies and vocations to which the party's periodicals appealed: cyclists could read the *Arbeiter-Radfahrer* (The Worker-Cyclist), the organ of the Worker-Cyclist Federation in Offenbach; choral groups could read the *Deutsche Arbeiter-Sängerzeitung* (The German Worker-Singers' News), the organ of the German Worker-Singers' Union. There were periodicals and organizations for gymnasts, temperance advocates, even stenographers and innkeepers. All of these papers were published in the thousands of copies, some exceeding 100,000. Social democratic societies, clubs, associations, and groups abounded everywhere to meet every personal need, taste, or proclivity. The official circulation of the party's humor magazine, the *Wahre Jakob*, soared to nearly 400,000. So frequently was it passed from hand to hand that its total readership is estimated to have been about 1.5 million devoted readers. Significantly, the party's theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit*, founded by Kautsky, did not exceed 11,000 readers, although it was the most intellectually sophisticated Marxist periodical in the world. The official social democratic newspaper, the *Vorwärts*, had a peak circulation of 165,000—a high figure for the organ of a national Social Democratic Party, to be sure, but trivial by comparison with *Wahre Jakob*, which addressed the tastes of the ordinary SPD member in search of lighter fare.

Joining the SPD meant entering an all-encompassing subculture, with activities to account for almost all of one's spare time. A member could attend his or her monthly local party meeting; a union meeting; lectures; local and district conferences; and the meetings of various cultural and professional associations devoted to ancillary activities from health to sports. There were festivals to enjoy, demonstrations in which to march—especially May Day parades, which were safely held on weekends, even if May 1 fell on a weekday—and protest meetings and electoral rallies to attend. Social democratic youths could go on hikes and encampments, and hold their own conferences, meetings, and rallies.

All of this made social democracy a veritable way of life for the ordinary worker. It fostered a commitment to the party that was not easily swayed by dissident ideas nor easily troubled by breaches of political integrity. One's friends and even one's family members were often social democrats, and one's political rivals were the Catholic adherents of the Center Party—which had its



own array of popular associations. The two groups could be distinguished from each other by their insignias, modes of dress, and even modes of expression as well as by their political opinions.

On the eve of the First World War, the German Social Democratic Party polled 34 percent of the votes for the Reichstag and gained 110 out of the 396 seats, thus making it the largest party in Germany. About 220 party members sat in state legislatures, more than 2,800 in city parliaments, and some 9,000 in rural town and village councils. Although social democratic deputies at all levels of government made themselves accessible to their constituents—especially during elections, when party members might be induced to campaign in their behalf—members of the Reichstag *Fraktion* (or caucus) in particular had become more and more removed from any lived contact with the membership. Consummately moderate in outlook, these deputies detested the “wild” radicals whose theories were aired in the party press and whose confrontational notions discredited them with Germany’s “better classes.” In time, some deputies even took issue with moderates within the party leadership itself who, in their eyes, were not quite moderate enough.

Indeed, far too many SPD Reichstag deputies (over twenty percent) were not only party members but leaders of the increasingly conservative trade unions. Their long climb through the trade-union apparatus to positions of state power and their deadening pragmatism made them disdainful of theories, principles, and, above all, seemingly impractical intellectuals. Placing a strong emphasis on *realpolitik*, they despised the idealism that had cemented the party during its “outlaw period,” and they disdained—sometimes with a bad conscience—party figures who still embodied the radical beliefs of their younger days. At the same time, like most parvenus, many of them harbored a covert admiration for the very nobility, the wealthy bourgeoisie, and even the military, which their program committed them to oppose.

The Reichstag *Fraktion*, in turn, became an independent power in its own right, literally standing apart from the party and party members and demanding political autonomy from the party’s institutions. They seemed to regard themselves as representatives not of the regular SPD voters alone but of all their constituents, including transitory supporters and the less politicized and radicalized ones. With the passage of time, the results of this devolution of party leadership and parliamentary deputation alike toward accommodation with the existing system were to prove ruinous, both to social democracy and to Germany.

Despite its enormous size and following, the German Social Democratic Party was by no means amorphous. Contrary to conventional myth, it was a highly centralized party whose congresses enforced strict discipline when necessary and had full authority to expel dissidents who they felt diverged sharply from the party’s doctrine. This discipline was especially enforced within

the Reichstag Fraktion, where on any given issue the delegates were obliged to vote in favor of the policy adopted by the caucus's majority, whether they personally agreed with it or not—and no matter how raucous and even bitter the debate within the caucus had been. In certain respects, this centralistic structure set a precedent for Lenin's views of how a socialist party should be structured in the face of opponents and in times of crisis. Although the party culture nurtured broad participation by members in its many social activities, the centralism and the discipline of the party structure served to restrict members' involvement in making important decisions, as witness the leadership's back-room concessions to the unions and the enormous power accrued by the party bureaucracy.

Taken as a whole, the history of the German Social Democratic Party and its unions from 1905 to 1914 is a gray story of moral decomposition amid stupendous economic growth, and of the primacy of quantity—in the form of members, Reichstag deputies, and financial resources (more than 20 million marks, an enormous sum in those days, were tied up in party business investments)—over quality, in the form of talent, revolutionary resoluteness, and theoretical insight. By 1914, the party was largely a conservative organization, despite its radical rhetoric. Its rejection of the general strike, as well as its pragmatic agreements with the government on dubious legislation, which compromised the party's principles, foreshadowed its collapse with the coming of the First World War.

Nonetheless, it is possible, indeed customary, to speak of a discernable Left, Right, and Center in the German Social Democratic Party during the years before the First World War. David W. Morgan, in his fascinating account, describes these three basic divisions. The Left, by remaining within the party instead of forming a new one, inadvertently perpetuated the illusion that the SPD was in some way the inheritor of the Marxian legacy. It was led primarily by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Clara Zetkin, as well as the aging and feeble Franz Mehring and a younger generation led by the little-known Paul Levi, Wilhelm Pieck, and other future founders of the German Communist Party.<sup>12</sup> These leftists consistently opposed the Revisionists' attempts to ease social democrats into positions of power or even to use the existing state to create a socialist society. To be sure, they themselves did not reject parliamentarism as such; rather, they regarded election campaigns as educational endeavors and Reichstag deputies primarily as public educators, not as mere legislators. Nor did the leftists, unlike the Revisionists, accept any agreements with bourgeois parties in the Reichstag. They adamantly adhered to the party's traditional precept of refusing to occupy ministerial positions in the government. Again, following a traditional party precept, the Left opposed any vote in support of the government's budgets, as an indication of its noncooperation with the bourgeois state. In 1914 it would firmly oppose the



war as imperialist, calling for international proletarian solidarity against all the contending governments and the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist system.

As for the political temperature of the party membership—the ordinary rank-and-file members—by far the majority could be found in the broad Center, very often content with the social insurance and other benefits in the existing society that the party defended on their behalf. Most of the party executive, editors, and leading bureaucrats were also part of the Center, as were Friedrich Ebert, the most colorless, supremely bureaucratic embodiment of the party's pragmatic malaise, and Carl Legien, the chieftain of the Free Unions, who in fact belonged to its right wing.

The most important leaders of the SPD's Center, ironically, were some of the very men who presented themselves rhetorically as guardians of Marxist orthodoxy, namely Bebel up to his death in 1913, Hugo Haase who replaced him as party chairman, and Karl Kautsky. While the Center, in theory, accepted the basic party precepts upheld by the Left, in practice it dealt with them as naïve and idealistic encumbrances. Like a congregation reciting the Decalogue, the Center mouthed the party's basic precepts all the more to ignore them in daily life. As the SPD aged into growing respectability, it thus reinforced an ugly reification of language: even the most stolid of its bureaucrats and many of its members could rhetorically hail the struggle against war, invoke proletarian solidarity, and pay lip service to class conflict—only to follow an opportunistic direction in the face of a crisis, with lowered banners and sullied placards.

There is little doubt that this Center, giving due allowance to all its gradations, never accepted insurrection as a means to achieve a socialist society. Even in the 1890s, Wilhelm Liebknecht (he died in 1900 at the age of seventy-four) had mouthed phrases about the need to use force in dislodging capitalism, only to waver and make compromises with reformists to preserve party stability. Kautsky, ostensibly a bastion of Marxist orthodoxy, abhorred violence and civil war; his own ideas of a revolutionary strategy did not go beyond the need to gain an electoral majority in the Reichstag and confront the government with his highly centralistic version of socialism. Bebel, as we have seen, was the architect of the most significant compromise that the party made with its Marxian heritage. His popularity as a leader of the Center, however, remained undiminished. Perhaps most accurate is the comment that George Ledebour, a left-centrist Reichstag deputy, once made to the young Leon Trotsky; the SPD, he declared, consists of "twenty per cent radicals, thirty per cent opportunists—and the rest follow Bebel," honoring radical rhetoric in the breach.<sup>13</sup>

Reformism sank such deep roots into the SPD that when a successful takeover of Germany by an armed proletariat actually became feasible, the party completely failed the revolutionary workers in its most basic commitments. The party leadership showed itself to be, at best, liberal democratic in orientation,

seeking to change an empire into a republic by making a number of social reforms, and at worst, overtly counterrevolutionary, a prop for reaction cynically draped in a red flag, mouthing empty radical verbiage to confuse its followers.

The party's ideological right wing, notably Bernstein's Revisionists, needless to say, made no attempt to espouse revolutionary Marxian principles. It expressly viewed capitalism as a long-lived, stable social order that could not be overthrown by revolution and sought to jettison Marxist theories of growing economic immiseration (*Verelendung*) and impending class war. So numerous were the votes cast against Revisionist proposals at party and International congresses that the followers of Bernstein sometimes seemed to exist merely as a foil for the Left and the Center to attack. But despite their numerous defeats, Revisionists shared more common ground with the party membership than the party's Marxian rhetoric allowed most observers of the SPD to perceive.

More disturbing—and dangerous—than the Revisionists themselves were outright, run-of-mill reformists such as the trade unionists and the members from the southern German states, who sat in the state legislatures, made shady deals with bourgeois parties, and voted for legislative reforms in virtual disregard of party precepts and Marxian theory. Indeed, more accurately than the Left and the Center, this Right reflected by its behavior the growing drift within the party away from appeals for social revolution and toward appeals for democratic reform.

The consistently poor showing of the extreme Left can be partly explained by the enormous economic and social benefits the German working class had gained by the turn of the century. Bismarck had shrewdly courted the proletariat with the most advanced social legislation in the world, and the SPD, by virtue of the additional reforms it gained, provided the German working class with a vested interest in the preservation of capitalism. Approximately eleven million German workers acquired retirement benefits and medical insurance; and eighteen million were insured against accidents—benefits that were virtually unknown to workers elsewhere in Europe. Almost every detail of workplace life, from maximum hours to the number of latrines in a shop, were regulated by governmental legislation. Bebel, who had a canny ability to understand the German proletariat and seemingly read its mind, acidly noted as he watched a parade of Prussian Guards in 1892, "Look at those fellows; eighty per cent of them are Berliners and Social Democrats but if there was trouble they would shoot me down at a word of command from above."<sup>14</sup> In any case, as long as no major crisis compelled the German Social Democratic Party to finally cast off its radical rhetoric and show itself fully as a reformist party, nearly all its leading members could smugly pay tribute to Marxian ideas and radical party precepts. Although the SPD's annual congresses had become



an ongoing battleground for debates over everything from Revisionism to the role of the general strike, the party managed to maintain a facade of ideological unity up to 1913, when Bebel died after years of balancing the Left and Right without any major defections.

His death marked the end of an era and the overt collapse of the SPD's revolutionary facade. Only a year later, in August 1914, the long-dreaded challenge came, when the Kaiser demanded that the Reichstag vote for war credits to support the army in the First World War. How would the SPD deputies vote? Would they remain true to their Marxian internationalism and reject the war as imperialist? Or would they succumb to nationalism and vote to support the war effort? The party was too heavily invested in its presses, offices, and properties, and too committed to reforming and thereby preserving the very society it was sworn to undo, to respond to the crisis of 1914 in a revolutionary manner. Its parliamentary *Fraktion*, despite bitter disagreements by a minority of deputies, voted as a bloc in favor of credits to finance the war.

The only surprising aspect of this vote was the incredulity expressed by many radicals both within and without the party when they heard of the SPD's vote in the Reichstag in August 1914. Its capitulation could have been foreseen years earlier, especially after it gave in to the trade unions at Mannheim, and its own tepid behavior at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the International, where a sizable part of the SPD delegation hesitated to take an adamant stand against the Reich in the event of a war. The astonishment of the socialist Left is perhaps understandable only because the German Social Democratic Party was internationally regarded as the foundation, indeed the model party, of a Marxist International—indeed, "the party of Marx"—whose congresses brought together the most advanced revolutionaries of the period.

## THE SPD AND THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

The German Social Democratic Party enjoyed enormous eminence among the delegates to the Second International and shaped the organization, structurally and politically, in its own image. As a result, the International became heir to many of the same conservative tendencies that beleaguered the German party.

The first indication that the SPD's influence on the International would mark a drift to the right appeared as early as the founding congress on the Rue Pétrelle in 1889. The issue, as we have seen, was May Day, the proletarian "holiday" intended to express international working-class solidarity and militancy. The militants at the congress wanted to pass a resolution supporting full participation in the protests, calling on workers' organizations to join in strikes and demonstrations on May 1. By contrast, the Germans, as we have seen, were

adamantly opposed to any work stoppage that might be suggestive of a general strike, even if only for a single day. May Day, according to the SPD, was to be a "holiday" or at most a weekend or evening display of working-class strength.

Accordingly, when the Rue Pétrelle congress passed a resolution supporting May Day, the SPD delegates added a rider that left it to the discretion of the individual national parties to determine what kind of specific action would take place. The SPD's anemic rider was adopted, although it produced considerable resentment among the more militant organizations in the new International. That the German position could have been adopted at all demonstrated how shaky, as early as 1889, were the revolutionary commitments of the professed revolutionary movements of Europe—even in the matter of a symbolic one-day work stoppage. The resentment of the militants resurfaced during the International's Congress at Zurich in 1893, when Victor Adler, challenging the SPD's cautious behavior, carried a vote in favor of demonstrations on May 1, irrespective of whether it was a workday. The German delegation furiously opposed Adler's resolution. Shortly afterward, in Germany itself, the SPD turned the Adler resolution into a dead letter at its annual party congress at Cologne, where it openly rejected the use of the general strike except for very restricted goals. As it turned out, the inability of the Second International to commit itself to participation in an international day of proletarian solidarity augured the conservative drift that was soon to come.

Once the International adopted Marxism as its official ideology in 1893 and expelled the anarchists in 1896, its meetings became highly stylized, with well-ordered speeches, committees, and resolutions, and of course, the prescribed and highly decorative red banners of socialism. Form increasingly dominated substance, and loyalities were often based as much on the delegates' feelings of awe for particular socialist leaders as on the content of their orations. After 1900 an International Socialist Bureau in Brussels functioned as a clearing-house for reports and data on the labor movement, chaired by Émile Vandervelde, the stormy petrel of the Belgian Workers' Party. It was as close to a permanent coordinating body as the Second International would ever create in its nearly three decades of active existence, and its powers were minimal, even meager, leaving all the associated parties to follow their own whims and desires, with little or no regard for one another's behavior.

In all, the Second International held nine congresses between 1889 and 1912. Its resolutions at these congresses, to be sure, established certain standards of revolutionary political behavior—an emphasis on revolution over reform, the rejection in principle of entry into bourgeois governments, opposition to a European war and to militarism generally, and even support for the general arming of the people. But like the resolutions of the SPD, these standards defined revolutionary Marxian socialism only on paper and were often honored in the breach.



Not only did the International become a replica of the German Social Democratic Party in its rhetorical commitment to revolution and internationalism, but to a great extent it too was bedeviled by Revisionist tendencies, especially over the issue of the general strike. When the strike issue came up, the International essentially threw it back into the laps of the individual parties, which fatally removed it from the arena of worldwide proletarian action. But the general strike issue refused to disappear from the International's agenda, any more than it could elude the agenda of the German party, especially after the 1905 Revolution in Russia. As in Germany, Rosa Luxemburg and her comrades continually pushed, in the International, for the right to use the general strike as a revolutionary weapon rather than as a means to gain limited ends such as the eight-hour day or suffrage. Her efforts were entirely without avail—but the issue hovered over the International like a ghost, especially as a worldwide war approached.

In fact, the all-important question of how the International would respond to a world war produced a major division between Left and Right at several congresses. The Left should, in fact, have produced an open split, but it failed to do so because of a misplaced commitment to the fetish of organizational "unity." At the 1907 Stuttgart Congress, following the passage of a tepid antiwar resolution introduced by Bebel, Rosa Luxemburg and the principal Russian delegates at the Congress, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Julius Martov, introduced a more militant amendment, which the delegates dutifully adopted. The International thus declared:

If a war threatens to break out, it is a duty of the working class in the countries affected ... to make every effort to prevent the war by all means which seem to them appropriate. ... Should a war none the less break out, it is their duty to ... make use of the economic and political crisis created by the war to stir up the deepest strata of the people and precipitate the fall of capitalist domination.<sup>15</sup>

This resolution was of crucial importance. It went beyond purely defensive action to prevent or oppose a war, such as a refusal to vote for war credits and engage in demonstrations. Indeed, it essentially called upon social democrats to use the conflict and its socially destabilizing effects to promote an outright proletarian insurrection against capitalism itself. But even this leftist resolution was diluted, as G.D.H. Cole points out:

Nothing was said about the general strike, or about insurrection—the Germans saw to that; but thanks to the Russian addition the prescription for action went a long way beyond the mere parliamentary protests which alone had been explicitly set forth in Bebel's draft. The general strike was not ruled

out—it was passed over in silence; and the same can be said of insurrection, which can indeed be regarded as implicit in the final resolution.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, on the war issue, the International committed itself to nothing—and as time was to show, it would do nothing when hostilities broke out, to its lasting disgrace.

No less haunting than the general strike issue was the failure of the International to decisively reject the entry of social democrats into bourgeois cabinets, a crisis that was precipitated by Alexandre Millerand, a socialist member of the French Chamber of Deputies, who agreed to become a minister in René Waldeck-Rousseau's government in 1899. Although Millerand was eventually expelled from the French Socialist Party, the International at its Fifth Congress in Paris in 1900 passed a resolution (prepared by Kautsky) against "entrism," as it was called—but very noticeably, without condemning it entirely. The resolution, shepherded through the Congress by Jean Jaurès (who later became the indubitable leader of the French Socialists), was symptomatic of the inability of the Left revolutionaries to shake off the influence of governmental opportunists within the International. The equivocal resolution satisfied neither the Right nor the Left at the Congress: while the Left was appalled by any participation in the bourgeois state, French and south German reformists were piqued that any restriction at all was placed on their freedom to form governing coalitions with bourgeois parties.

To be sure, the International repeatedly and ritualistically condemned Bernstein's Revisionism and thereby declared its nominal adherence to revolutionary socialism. But as in the case of the German SPD, such routine declarations carried less and less weight in practice. In nearly every European social democratic party, revolutionaries of the word were making parliamentary and political compromises that amounted to a *de facto* acceptance of Bernstein's approach. Millerand's entry into the French government was followed by that of Aristide Briand, who became minister of education in 1906; then by John Burns, the British labor leader, who simply abandoned socialism altogether and entered the Liberal ministry (ironically, resigning from it because of his opposition to the war in 1914). These were only the more notable and explicit defections to "Millerandism," as the disease was called. Bernstein's Revisionism reflected practices that were already adopted in nearly all the parties of the International well in advance of the outbreak of war in 1914. Indeed, many of the parties affiliated with the Second International eventually provided Europe, during and after the war years, with prominent bourgeois statesmen, some of whom became outright patriotic chauvinists.

As the first decade of the new century drew to its close, the International was faced with the grimmest practical test of all. The likelihood of war challenged it to take an antiwar position less tepid than the one it had adopted at Stuttgart. At



its Copenhagen Congress in 1910, Keir Hardie, the British socialist, together with the French socialists and delegates of the British Labour Party, introduced an amendment to the antiwar resolution that recommended the use of a general strike in case of war. Although Hardie tried to limit the applicability of the general strike to workers engaged only in war industries and only in belligerent countries rather than the international working class as a whole, his resolution foundered on the objections of the right-wing tendencies within the International, which regarded the general strike as too provocative. Nor did the resolution proposed by Hardie (who was more of a pacifist than a revolutionist) satisfy the Left, which supported the general strike but also thought the resolution should state, as Luxemburg and Lenin's did, that a war would almost certainly weaken capitalism and provide the opportunity for a proletarian insurrection. After much stormy debate, all mention of a general strike was eventually written out of the antiwar resolution, and the International went on with business as usual.

In the end, the Copenhagen Congress did what it all too often did: it left the question of antiwar activities to the discretion of its individual member parties. This repeated avoidance of the most pressing issue facing the world proletariat—by shifting its responsibility for opposing war to its constituent organizations—clearly revealed the International's refusal to deal with a war crisis that concerned all of Europe: indeed, it abdicated its duty to act in the interests of the proletariat as a whole, crassly subverting the very internationalism on which its existence was predicated. In this respect, the Second International had committed suicide long before Europe's armies were sent into a horrifying four-year bloodbath in August 1914. An emergency congress held at Basel in November 1912 to take up the war issue again produced nothing more than ruminations about the importance of preventing a then-raging Balkan conflict from turning into a continental war. Apart from pious platitudes about international working-class solidarity, the International still had no firm strategy in place should a general European war erupt.

The spirit of internationalism, however, was not entirely dead in European social democracy. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, Léon Jouhaux, the chief of the French syndicalist CGT, appealed to Carl Legien, the chief of the social democratic German Free Unions, to join him in calling for a general strike against the oncoming conflict. So deeply was German social democracy afflicted with the pathologies of nationalism and expediency that Legien responded only with an icy silence. Indeed, Legien's silence in the face of Jouhaux's plea was brutally eloquent: so corrupt was the German party that it indirectly promoted the outbreak of war by freeing the Kaiser's hands to send his armies plunging into Belgium.

In August 1914 the internationalist effusions of European social democracy became chaff in the wind, as social democrats in most countries voted in their

legislatures or resolved in their parties to support the war effort of their respective countries. Shaped largely by the German social democrats, the Second International ignominiously dissolved; indeed, many of its leaders, with a rudeness born of chauvinism, refused even to speak to their erstwhile colleagues in belligerent countries, who had suddenly been transformed by the war from comrades into enemies. "Western Marxism," as its academic acolytes were to call it some seventy years later, proved completely bankrupt in the face of the first great crisis of the twentieth century. When the SPD decided to vote for war credits in August 1914, uniformed German socialists, with the blessing of their party, marched off to slaughter their Belgian and French comrades in the trenches of the Western Front. Even many leading anarchists, men of the stature of Peter Kropotkin, supported the Allied cause, to the consternation of their antistatist comrades. The International disappeared without a whimper, leaving its carefully forged proclamations of class solidarity to the gnawing teeth of mice.

The forty-three-year period between the crushing of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the outbreak of the First World War proved to be a tragic interregnum in the history of revolutionary movements. Yet despite the basic conservatism of the Second International, the spirit of revolt did not disappear completely. It resurfaced with furious intensity in Russia, where capitalism had only begun to intrude, ending the paralysis that had been produced by European social democracy for nearly three decades.

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## NOTES

1. Gary P. Steenson, *"Not One Man! Not One Penny!": German Social Democracy, 1863-1914* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), pp. 31-2.

2. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 24: Marx-Engels 1874-1883 (New York: International Publishers, 1989), pp. 77-99. A full English translation of the Gotha Program appears as an appendix in Steenson's book. I have taken the liberty of using the quotations from Marx's *Critique* for my account of the program here.

3. Quoted by Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1963), p. 79.

4. Erfurt Program (1891), in Steenson, *"Not One Man!"* p. 247.

5. Steenson, *"Not One Man!"* p. 248.

6. Quoted in Roth, *Social Democrats in Imperial Germany*, p. 87.

7. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" (or "Address of the Central Authority to the League") in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10: Marx-Engels 1849-1851 (New York: International Publishers, 1978), pp. 286.

8. Steenson, *"Not One Man!"* p. 103-4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 104.



10. Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 127.
11. Quoted by Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (1928; Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1979), p. 100. The emphasis in this quotation is probably Perlman's.
12. David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917-1922* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1975).
13. Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 215.
14. Quoted by Sir Valentine Chirol, *Fifty Years in a Changing World* (New York: Harcourt, 1928), p. 274.
15. Quoted by G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialism*, vol. 3, part 1: *The Second International, 1889-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 67-8.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

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## Bibliographical Essay

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### GENERAL WORKS

It would be difficult to gain an understanding of the revolutions discussed in this book without placing them in the general context of nineteenth-century European history. The range of historical works covering this immensely important period, of course, is enormous, but several general histories are exceptional. The latter half of R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton's *A History of the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) and particularly David Thomson's *Europe Since Napoleon*, 2nd edn revised (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), are invaluable sources for the social environment in which the classical nineteenth-century revolutions occurred. An excellent overall history of the first half of the century is William L. Langer's *Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), in the *Rise of Modern Europe* series.

Among the economic histories, few equaled Ernest L. Bogart's *Economic History of Europe, 1760-1939* (London and New York: Longmans, Green, 1942), with its wealth of information about the nineteenth century. Fernand Braudel's *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) provides a valuable historical background to the conditions that led to the Industrial Revolution. The classic work on the development of the industrial economy is Arnold Toynbee's *The Industrial Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956, originally published in 1914), which was actually based on the notes of students and friends who attended his lectures between 1880 and 1881. This small book managed to raise most of the important issues that stemmed from the Industrial Revolution and, more than a century after the original lectures, is still rewarding reading. Alan S. Milward and S. B. Saul's *The Economic Development of Continental Europe, 1780-1870* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973) is to be recommended, as are J. L. Hammond and Barbara



Hammond's somewhat dated but still eminently informative and readable *The Rise of Modern Industry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969, originally published in 1925) and their *The Town Labourer* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968). Eminently readable and useful as a corrective for accounts that overemphasize the extent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, focusing instead on the persistence of precapitalist agrarian lifeways and feudal and aristocratic institutions during the century prior to the First World War, is Arno J. Mayer's *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

Many original documents that I have cited were drawn from document collections, of which the most notable are *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, well selected and edited by Raymond Posgate (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, edited by Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders (New York: Doubleday, 1964); and the *Documents of Revolution* series, published by Thames and Hudson in Great Britain and Cornell University Press in the United States.

Nothing in English equals G.D.H. Cole's superb six-volume *A History of Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953-1960), a truly outstanding treatment of socialistic thinkers. Max Beer's two-volume work of *The General History of Socialism and Social Struggles* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957) is a highly readable contribution to the history of socialism and revolutionary uprisings from earliest times in the West to the early twentieth century. As a one-volume history of various socialisms, Harry W. Laidler's *History of Socialism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968) is a very readable, highly accurate, and a generally outstanding achievement. One of the most elegant and insightful studies of socialism and anarchism is George Lichtheim's *The Origins of Socialism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969); although it is essentially an interpretation of Cole's six-volume work, Lichtheim's perspective is provocative. Wolfgang Abendroth's *A Short History of the European Working Class* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972) is a synoptic overview of the workers' movement from 1848 to the Second World War, while James H. Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) is a rather frantic and scattered compilation of important data as well as gossip about revolutionaries and revolutionary movements, from which the reader will learn such esoterica as the origins of the "Marseillaise" and the "Internationale" as well as key movements such as the Society of the Seasons. Although some of its facts are arguable, it is still a mine of information as well as rapid-fire accounts of events and ideas. Although Alexander Gray's *The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) is informative, the author so patently hates his subject that he tends to alienate the reader and render his account inaccessible to all but outright antisocialists.

So much does the span of Louis-Auguste Blanqui's life cover the nineteenth

century that his biographies—alas, still too few in number—can be cited under the heading of “general reading.” His most devoted and informed biographer was Maurice Dommanget, whose several books on Blanqui are available in French. I have found most useful for my purposes his *Auguste Blanqui: Des Origines à la révolution de 1848: Premiers combats et premières prisons* (Paris and Le Haye: Mouton, 1969). The earliest English-language biography of Blanqui seems to be Neil Stewart’s *Blanqui* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), a highly dramatized account with a number of doubtful facts, but an entertaining Marxist interpretation of the great revolutionary. Less tendentious and more accurate is Samuel Bernstein’s *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). Finally, Max Nomad gave a highly readable account of Blanqui’s life in *Apostles of Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1961). A very good exposition of Blanqui’s social ideas is Alan B. Spitzer’s *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), which also provides a limited amount of biographical material.

Biographies of other major thinkers and revolutionary leaders of the nineteenth century are invaluable as accounts of nineteenth-century social conditions and socialist ideas. To this day, I still regard Franz Mehring’s *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), as the best account of Marx’s life and thought. It is based, in part, on personal interviews with some of Marx’s closest collaborators, and a portion of the book was written by Rosa Luxemburg. David McClellan’s *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) is more up to date but lacks the vividness and warmth that Mehring brought to his own endeavor.

Histories of anarchism are rather plentiful, but the most recent and comprehensive is Peter Marshall’s *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992). G.D.H. Cole has written extensively and sympathetically on nineteenth-century anarchism in *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890*, the second volume of his *History of Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1961). The original edition of George Woodcock’s *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962) treated anarchism as a ghost that offered social democrats useful notions and little more; its revision (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986) was much needed. Daniel Guérin’s *Anarchism* (New York and London: Monthly Review, 1970) is a remarkably informative summary of anarchist history and ideas. Out of print at this writing, it is soon to be republished by A.K. Press of San Francisco and Edinburgh.

A comprehensive English-language biography of Mikhail Bakunin has yet to be written. Although E. H. Carr’s *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938) has been often cited as the “authoritative” account of Bakunin’s life, it is so hostile and even intemperate that it deserves the neglect it is currently



receiving. More useful and sympathetic biographies include Brian Morris's *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom* (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1993) and Richard B. Saltman's *The Social and Political Thought of Michael Bakunin* (London and Westport: Greenwood, 1983). The best selection of Bakunin's writings is *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, translated by Steven Cox and Olive Stevens and edited and introduced by Arthur Lehning (New York: Grove Press, 1973). Lehning was the editor of the Bakunin Archives at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. The most comprehensive collection of Bakunin's writings in English is G. P. Maximoff's *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: Free Press, 1953), a tour de force of careful selection of excerpts from Bakunin's writings, organized by subject matter. *Bakunin on Anarchy*, edited and translated by Sam Dolgoff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), contains many of Bakunin's most important writings, but the editor, a committed anarchosyndicalist, tended to overemphasize this aspect of Bakunin's thinking.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's life and ideas have received reverential treatment from his admirers, especially Edward Hyams's *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind, and Works* (London: John Murray, 1979) and George Woodcock's *Proudhon* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1987). The best selection of his writings in English translation is *Selected Writings of P.-J. Proudhon*, translated by Elizabeth Fraser and edited by Stewart Edwards (New York: Doubleday, 1969). Only a few of Proudhon's books are available in English; the most important ones are *What is Property?* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), *General Idea of Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by John Beverly Robinson (London: Pluto Press, 1989)—in my view, Proudhon's most coherent expression of his ideas—and *The Principle of Federation*, translated and introduced by Richard Vernon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979). Robert Graham's introduction to *General Idea of Revolution* generally gives a fair summary of Proudhon's ideas.

## PART V: ARTISANAL SOCIALISM

The best single account of the ideological transition from Jacobinism to socialism is G.D.H. Cole's *Socialist Thought: The Forerunners 1789-1850*, the first volume of his *History of Socialist Thought*. The squalor and hardship that the Industrial Revolution inflicted on the British working class is superbly presented in Frederick Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 4: *Marx and Engels 1844-1845* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 295-596. This very important book, originally published in 1845, is ably revisited by Steven

Marcus in *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962) provides a very valuable comparative picture of the rise of capitalism and the working classes in Britain and France, as well as significant cultural changes in both countries. Hobsbawm's *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) is useful on the changing economic and social conditions that fostered artisanal socialism in Britain and France. E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963) is a masterpiece. One of the most responsible studies of the Luddites is Malcolm I. Thomas, *The Luddites: Machine-Breaking in Regency England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972). A dramatic account of the Luddite movement appears in the first half of Kirkpatrick Sale's *Rebels Against the Future* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1995), but the second half deteriorates into technophobia and appeals for deindustrialization. Dorothy Thompson's *The Chartist: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) is a masterful overview of the subject, and her collection of studies on Chartism, coedited with James Epstein, *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture 1830-60* (London: Macmillan, 1982) is a feast of literature on almost every aspect of Chartism. A city-by-city account will be found in *Chartist Studies*, edited by Asa Briggs (New York and London: Macmillan, 1959).

For economic development and working-class movements in France, William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement, 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) are both of immense value. They are filled with invaluable information and challenging analyses, although each goes too far in reading contemporary notions of collectivism into the largely artisanal world of the nineteenth century.

Excellent essays on the formation of the French working class appear in *Working-Class Formations: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, edited by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Tom Kemp's *Economic Forces in French History* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971) is a fine survey of the unique development of the French economy in the strategic period between the Great Revolution and the rise of Louis Napoleon. A valuable account of the interaction between French factory owners and proletarians is Peter N. Stearns, *Paths to Authority: The Middle Class and the Industrial Labor Force in France, 1820-48* (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1978). John Plamenatz's *The Revolutionary Movement in France* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952) is a brief but insightful study of three great revolutions (1830, 1848, and



the Commune of 1871), with good accounts of the events that led up to them. But perhaps the most remarkable comparison of French and British artisans, and their respective courses of development, is in Gwyn A. Williams's superbly written *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (London: Edward A. Arnold, 1986). George Rudé's *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848* (New York and London: John Wiley and Sons, 1964) is a classic account of insurrectionary crowds.

A good English-language account of the Babeuf conspiracy is David Thomson's *The Babeuf Plot: The Making of a Republican Legend* (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), while Babeuf's own voice can be heard in *The Defense of Gracchus Babeuf*, edited and translated by John Anthony Scott (New York: Schocken Books, 1975). Selections from the writings of early French socialists appear in Fried and Sanders's *Socialist Thought*, and Frank E. Manuel's excellent essays on Saint-Simon and Fourier have been collected in *The Prophets of Paris* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Cabet and his Icarian movement are explored in great detail by Christopher H. Johnson in *Utopian Communism in France* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). Louis Blanc's ideas on artisanal socialism are expounded in his 1848: *Historical Revelations* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1858).

The two most outstanding accounts in English of the French Revolution of 1830 are Pamela Pilbeam's *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) and David H. Pinkney's *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972). These works may be supplemented by the invaluable collection of studies, *1830 in France*, edited and introduced by John M. Merriman (New York and London: Franklin Watts, 1975). The two major insurrections that exploded in the silk-weaving center of Lyon, in 1831 and 1834, are well detailed in Robert Bezucha's *The Lyon Uprising of 1834: Social and Political Conflict in the Early July Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1974). Bezucha's is one of the best accounts of artisanal socialism or associationism in the literature. The great and tragic insurrectionary history of the Lyon working class is completed by Mary Lynn Steward-McDougall's *The Artisan Republic: Revolution, Reaction, and Resistance in Lyon, 1848-1851* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).

## PART VI: THE BARRICADES OF PARIS

A major source for the first decade of the July Monarchy is Louis Blanc's two-volume *The History of Ten Years: 1830 to 1840* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1845), which deals with all aspects of French life under Louis-Philippe,

including many important events to which Blanc was a witness. Some of the realistic novels of the period provide excellent contemporary glimpses of Parisian working-class life, especially Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (New York: Hippocrene Books, n.d.), and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, available in many editions. The social conditions of working-class Paris during this period are explored in considerable detail in Louis Chevalier's *Working Classes and Dangerous Class in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Frank Jellinek (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

The literature on the 1848 Revolution in France is considerable, but of immense importance are the reminiscences and historical accounts set down by participants and eyewitnesses. Writing under the pseudonym Daniel Stern, the Countess d'Agoult's fine *Histoire de la révolution de 1848* provides a wealth of description and dramatic detail by a perceptive and astute observer. This work, originally published in three volumes between 1850 and 1853 (Paris: Gustave Sandre) and subsequently republished by other French houses, has been an invaluable source for nearly all later histories of the Revolution in Paris; lamentably, it has not been translated into English. Alexis de Tocqueville, another eyewitness to the Revolution, narrates the events in *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Macmillan, 1896), providing rich personal characterizations as well as insightful analyses that reach many of the same conclusions as Marx, but from the other side of the barricades. Alphonse de Lamartine's *History of the French Revolution of 1848* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871) is more a self-serving memoir, in which all events seem to center around himself and his cronies. Although it is sometimes factually unreliable, as revealed by cross-references with other sources, it vividly conveys the heated atmosphere of the time and recounts the desperate attempt by the Provisional Government to keep the workers out of power. By contrast, Louis Blanc's *1848: Historical Revelations* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1858), an indispensable account by a leading participant, appears to be marked by considerable honesty, as well as by hostility to radicals such as Blanqui.

Valuable documentary material on the 1848 Revolution is collected in *1848 in France*, edited by Roger Price as part of the Documents in Revolution series (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) and Postgate's *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*. A superb collection of monographic papers is Roger Price's *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), which includes studies on artisan unrest, the club movement, and the crushing of the *démoc-socs*, as well Charles Tilly and Lynn H. Lees's fascinating research into the occupations and background of the June insurgents.

One of the most thoughtful overviews of the 1848 Revolution is in Priscilla Robertson's *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952)—the section on the French events manages to say more in 100 pages



and provide a better interpretation of the French events than other books of a much larger size. Georges Duveau's *1848: The Making of a Revolution*, translated by Anne Carter (New York: Random House, 1967), dramatically presents the Revolution from the standpoint of three socially different members of French society. Finally, Arnold Whitridge's *Men in Crisis: The Revolutions of 1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949) fleshes out the Revolution with biographical characterizations that are rich in political meaning.

The specialized accounts of aspects of the 1848 Revolution by recent scholars are fascinating in their political and social implications. Peter H. Amann's *Revolution and Mass Democracy: The Paris Club Movement in 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975) is unmatched as a study of the popular working-class democracy that was created through the clubs, showing how the working and lower middle classes sustained remarkable networks of mass organizations that acted as a powerful impetus to the Revolution. Donald Cope McKay's *The National Workshops: A Study in the French Revolution of 1848* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) is an excellent study of the workshops and their employees in that strategic year. Mark Traugott's *Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985) focuses in detail on the June insurrection, with particular emphasis on the methods that the privileged classes used to recruit from within the working class itself the Mobile Guards and, to an extent, the National Workshops, counterrevolutionary forces that would be deployed against the June insurrection.

John M. Merriman's *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848-1851* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978) takes up the crushing of the *démoc-socs* both within and outside of Paris in the aftermath of the June insurrection, while Ted W. Margadant's *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979) examines in detail the rural uprising that followed Bonaparte's coup in the aftermath of 1848. David H. Pinkney's account of Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris during the Second Empire is outstanding; along with providing statistical material, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958) vividly depicts important features of Parisian city life during the first half of the century.

No understanding of the 1848 period is possible without consulting Karl Marx's unequalled *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, both of which are available in the Marx-Engels *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969) and in the multivolumed *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1978 and 1979), volumes 10 and 11 respectively. The best critical exploration of Marx's own ideas and activities during the German Revolution of 1848-49 is P. H. Noyes,

*Organization and Revolution: Working-Class Associations in the German Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), which shows how Marx subordinated the workers' movement in Cologne to that of the liberal bourgeoisie. The book also provides an indispensable background on the shift Marx and Engels made in their "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," which is available in the first volume of the three-volume *Selected Works* and volume 10 of the *Collected Works*. Oscar J. Hammen has also written a highly readable account of the background to and activities of Marx and Engels in the German Revolution in *The Red '48ers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

English-language accounts of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) are more limited than those in French and German, but several of them give a good picture of its formation, congresses, and activities. The most comprehensive is G. M. Steklloff's *History of the First International*, translated from the Russian by Eden and Cedar Paul (London: Martin Lawrence, 1928). Unfortunately, Steklloff permitted his Marxist bias to interfere with his presentation, which seldom strays from the Communist, albeit pre-Stalinist "line" on the subject. A fine nonpartisan history is Henryk Katz's *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), which is concise and highly informative.

The first part of *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864-1943*, edited by Milorad M. Drachkoviich (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), is sketchy so far as the International as a whole is concerned, but it does contain the best account, albeit tongue in cheek, of the anarchist IWMA, namely Max Nomad's "The Anarchist Tradition." The most definitive Bakuninist history of the First International is available only in French, despite the fact it has been published in the United States: James Guillaume's *L'International: Documents et souvenirs (1864-1878)* (New York: B. Franklin, 1969) is a huge four-volume work that is labored in both style and form. Credit must be given to Franz Mehring, a German Marxist, for treating Bakunin very fairly and Marx rather critically, in his biography of Marx.

The literature—social, historical, and political—on the Paris Commune of 1871 is massive. A good place to start, for the nonspecialist reader, is Alistair Horne's *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune of 1871* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), a lively, dramatic account of the events leading up to the Commune and the Commune itself. Roger L. Williams's *The French Revolution of 1870-1871* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969) is another summary history. For those who wish more detail, the most authoritative account of the Commune in English is Stewart Edwards's *The Paris Commune 1871* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971). Edwards's mastery and presentation are unsurpassed, and his fine book deserves the closest reading by students of revolutionary movements. We are also fortunate that it was Edwards who edited *The Communards of Paris*,



1871 in the Documents of Revolution series (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; London: Thames and Hudson, 1973). Frank Jellinek's *The Paris Commune of 1871* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), an old standby, is guided by a Marxist viewpoint but is valuable as a supplement to Edwards's more authoritative work.

Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871*, translated from the French by Eleanor Marx Aveling (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967), is an excellent account written by a supporter of and participant in the Commune. Originally published in 1876, it is as much memoir as history and provides invaluable lived insights into the events; in the later decades of the nineteenth century, the Left considered it the official history of Commune. Lissagaray, it should be noted, was neither a Marxist nor an anarchist but a militant social revolutionary. Unfortunately, the English translation is overly literal, sacrificing much of the flavor of the original, but it also contains material by Lissagaray that does not appear in the French original, which was published most recently as *Histoire de la Commune de 1871* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970).

Eugene Schulkind's *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View From the Left* (New York: Grove Press, 1974) contains a wealth of contemporary documents and articles on the Commune and analyses by all major socialist and anarchist thinkers, from Bakunin and Kropotkin to Marx and Engels. The Marxist viewpoint is presented in Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France*, in volume 2 of the Marx-Engels *Selected Works* and in volume 22 of the *Collected Works*. All the extant Marx-Engels letters and works on the Commune were compiled in the former Soviet Union and published under the title *Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971). An invaluable comparative study of the participants and goals of the June 1848 uprising and the Commune is Roger V. Gould's *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Gould persuasively argues that the June insurrection was more class-oriented than the Commune, using considerable archival material to make his point.

Among the specialized studies on the Commune, Edith Thomas's *The Women Incendiaries*, translated from the French by James and Starr Atkinson (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1967), addresses the often neglected role that women played in the Commune. Thomas has also written a sympathetic biography of the anarchist Louise Michel, translated by Penelope Williams (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), which provides a libertarian perspective on the events of 1871 and an account of the life of an extraordinary woman of unforgettable heroism. The Commune is discussed, to some degree, in biographies of all revolutionary activists and thinkers who were involved with left-wing politics in 1871.

## PART VII: PROLETARIAN SOCIALISM

On the emergence of the industrial proletariat, the reader would do well to examine the historical accounts of the Industrial Revolution cited above. In addition, *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by John M. Merriman (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1979), is a collection of useful essays on proletarianization in Britain and France; Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) is also to be recommended. A richly illustrated and valuable account of the proletarianization as well as acculturation of Europeans for more than a century before the First World War is W. O. Henderson's *The Industrialization of Europe 1780-1914* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969). Also of interest is Richard J. Evans's *Proletarians and Politics: Socialism, Protest and the Working Class in Germany before the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990). Selig Perlman's *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1928) is still a provocative exploration of the modern labor movement in Britain, Germany, Russia, and the United States.

French syndicalism, especially its ideological roots, is examined in considerable detail by Jeremy Jennings in *Syndicalism in France: A Study of Ideas* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), while its trajectory as a labor movement is the subject of Peter Stearns's *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971). Both G.D.H. Cole and Harry Lasdler provide excellent summaries of syndicalism in their respective histories of socialism. The best account of anarchosyndicalism is Rudolf Rocker's *Anarcho-Syndicalism. Theory and Practice* (Indore, India: Modern Publishers, n.d.). Other summaries of anarchosyndicalism will be found in histories of anarchism cited above.

The finest single history of the Second International is G.D.H. Cole's *The Second International 1889-1914*, which makes up volume 3, part 1 of *A History of Socialist Thought*. James Joll's *The Second International (1889-1914)* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) is often unclear and tangled in its presentation but is still a useful summary. Another brief account of the International is Gerhart Niemeyer's "The Second International: 1889-1914," in Drachkovitch's *Revolutionary Internationals*.

The history of the Second International is so integrally tied to the emergence and development of German Social Democracy that excellent accounts of it appear in most serious discussions of the German socialist movement. General histories of Germany, in turn, are indispensable to an understanding of her socialist movements, as well as the central problems of nationalism and militarism. Geoffrey Barraclough's *The Origins of Modern Germany* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1984) provides an excellent overview of how these



problems took form from medieval to modern times. Arthur Rosenberg's *Imperial Germany: The Birth of the German Republic 1871-1918* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) is indispensable for an understanding of German unification and its consequences. The role of the Junkers in the consolidation and militarization of nineteenth-century Germany is explored in Edward Crankshaw's excellent biography, *Bismarck* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983). Nicholas Stargardt's *The German Ideal of Militarism: Radical and Socialist Critics 1866-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) is a searing account of German militarism and the criticisms voiced by Karl Kautsky, Karl Liebknecht, and other leading figures in the SPD.

A concise overall history of the German labor movement from its beginnings to the post-World War II period is in Helga Grebing's *The History of the German Labor Movement: A Survey*, abridged by Mary Saran and translated by Edith Koerner (Dover, N.H.: Berg Publishers, 1985). Several valuable histories of the German Social Democratic Party are available in English. The most comprehensive is Guenther Roth's *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working-Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1963). Gary P. Steenson's "Not One Man! Not One Penny!": *German Social Democracy, 1863-1914* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981) is a straightforward and vivid account of the SPD up to the outbreak of the First World War. Carl E. Schorske's *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1955) is deservedly a classic, tracing the descent of the prewar SPD from a seemingly revolutionary party to a crassly opportunistic one. Peter Gay's *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) is an excellent account of Bernstein and Revisionism.

William A. Pelz has compiled and edited a very interesting anthology of writings by and about Karl Liebknecht's father, Wilhelm Liebknecht and German Social Democracy, translated by Erich Hahn (Westport, CN., and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), which casts light on the SPD and the major disputes that arose within the SPD prior to 1900, when the elder Liebknecht died. These and later disputes are also admirably explored by J. P. Nettl in his two-volume biography, *Rosa Luxemburg* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1966). The best overall anthology of Luxemburg's works in English, reflecting the Left opposition within the SPD and the Second International, is Mary-Alice Waters's collection, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), which contains a stirring essay by Trotsky, "Hands Off Rosa Luxemburg!" Helmut Tromow's *Karl Liebknecht: A Political Biography* (Hamden, CN.: Archon, 1984) is a short account of the young German revolutionary whose life was entwined with Luxemburg's during the war years. No bibliography on German social democracy would be

satisfactory without Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Programme" and related materials from his pen, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 24 (New York: International Publishers, 1989).



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